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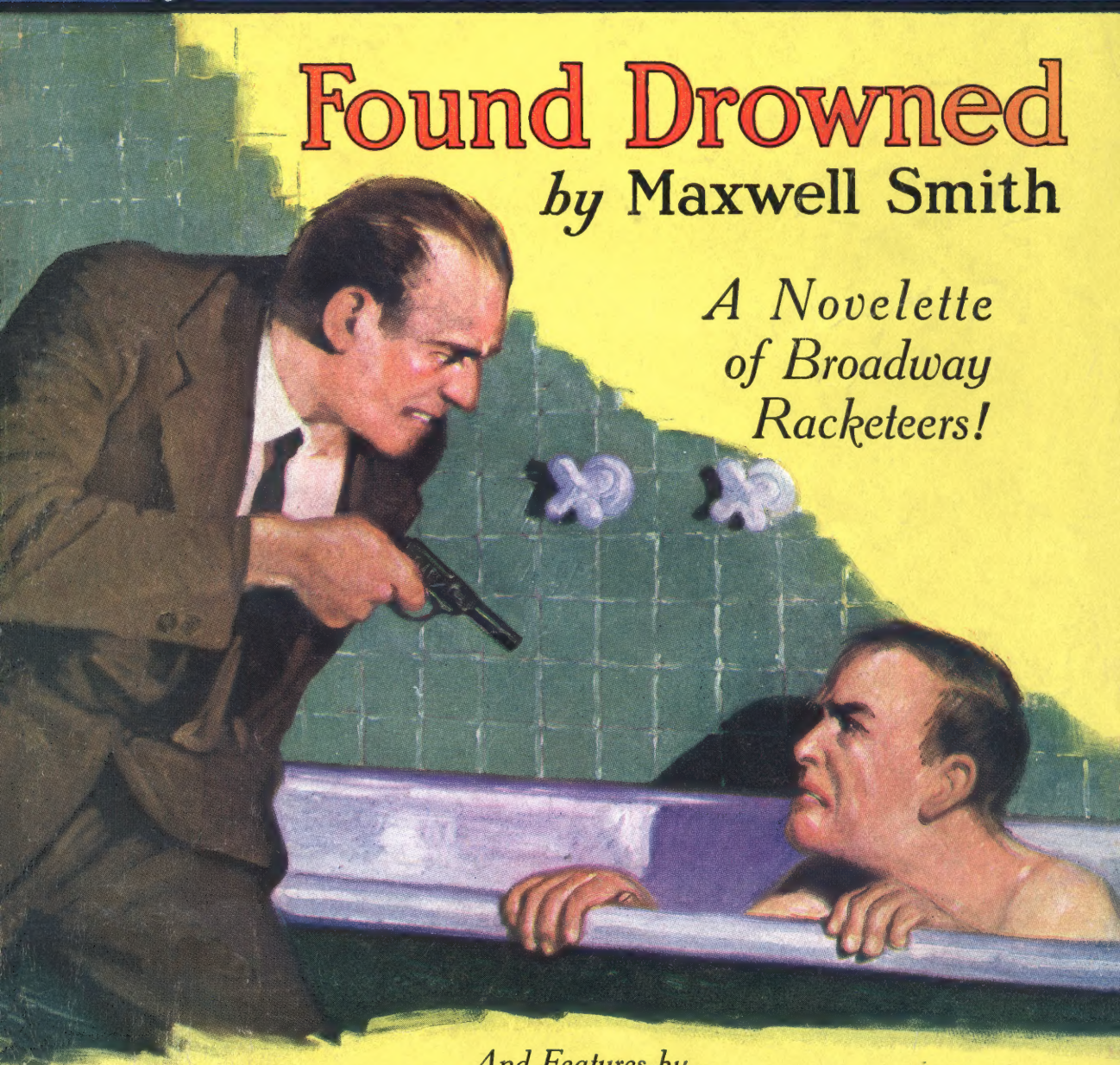

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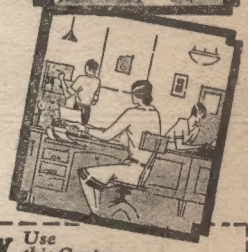

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"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"

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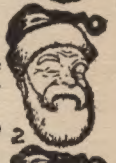

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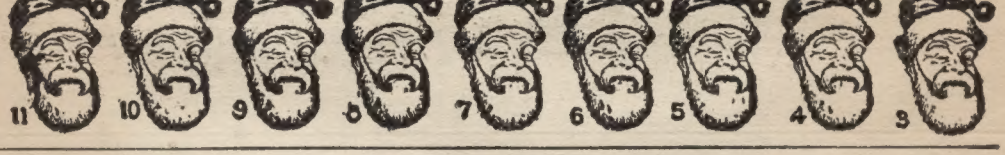

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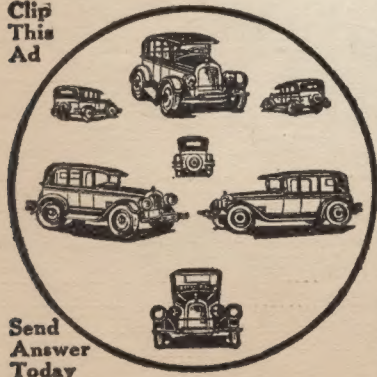

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"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"

VOLUME XLVI SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1929 NUMBER 2

Found Drowned

Murder Stalks Through the Fog Around Phil Walton's Lonely Bungalow—Crime and a Drama of Broadway Racketeers

"I'll get you one way or the other, big boy," she shrilled

A Novelette

By Maxwell Smith

CHAPTER I

Chee-Chee Lamar

"NO," said Walton decisively, "I won't do it. I'm not going to stand for any holdup like that."

He stretched his feet to the crackling driftwood fire. A tongue of purple flame burst hissing from a log. He watched it with a squint little smile. It was like many things—pretty and amusing while it lasted. Like Chee-Chee, for instance.

The tiny flame sputtered and died. He nodded. The show was over. Why couldn't Chee-Chee see things in that way—understand that the stage was dark; like the spot on that log where briefly purple flame had danced?

"Nothin' cookin'," he repeated. "Tell her that, Cranby, and get her out of here. I'm not going to argue with her, and I don't want her around. I've got business to tend to. Get her out."

Cranby didn't answer at once. Standing by the window he watched the streamers of fog drifting on over the rampart of dunes which shut off the sea a couple of hundred yards away. He couldn't agree with Walton upon such summary dismissal of Chee-Chee. As he saw it, the situation was bleak and treacherous as this April day and required tactful handling.

"Under the circumstances," he said, "I think you ought to see her or at least let me make her a proposition."

"I won't," said Walton. "She can't shake me down. Tell her—"

Cranby interrupted a shade irritably:

"You brought me down here to advise you. I'm giving you my best advice. If you're going to be pig-headed and won't take it, I wish you hadn't wasted my time."

"You're being paid for your time. Get rid of them, Cranby. Tell them we think they're funny. Tell them to go to hell."

Cranby walked over and took the chair on the other side of the hearth.

"You're making a mistake, Phil," he said earnestly, "and that's my honest opinion. She can make trouble and you know it."

"No! I'm not going to be held up, I tell you. She's got all that's coming to her. She can't blackmail me."

"It isn't blackmail," said the lawyer. "She's on safe ground there. She's simply giving you a chance to make good a promise before she starts suit."

"That's bunk. There was no promise. I'm not worrying; she can't do a thing. Wouldn't I be a sucker to marry a dame like that!"

"You didn't intend to, perhaps, but there's an implied promise which might get over with a jury. You never can tell about a jury when a looker like Chee-Chee is giving them the eye. You're up against a breach of promise suit, Phil, unless you make terms with her."

Walton poked the fire vigorously, sending up an angry shower of sparks.

"Let her sue. If she thinks a jury will give her anything, let her try and get it. I gave her plenty. Now I'm giving her the air and that's all."

"If that's the way you feel about it, all right."

"That's the way," said Walton.

Cranby got up and started for the door.

"How's the weather look?" asked Walton.

Cranby glanced out a window, seaward. The fog was still riding in over the dunes.

"Dirty."

"Not so good," said Walton. "Is it very thick?"

"Stringy," returned Cranby, and halted. "You've some stuff coming in to-night?"

"Um."

"Does she know?"

"Who?" Walton turned to look at him. "Chee-Chee? You must think I'm completely nutty."

"But she has a good idea, hasn't she?"

"Well, what of it?"

"And she's got a good idea about—everything."

Walton considered him derisively.

what you do, but I'm going now to look after mine."

Walton turned away, buttoning his overcoat, and started for the door.

Cervar caught Bazin's eye and shook his head.

Bazin muttered, but let Walton leave the room without further speech.

"Wait awhile," counseled Cervar while they were getting into their coats, "wait till we get the stuff ashore. Then if you want to tell him what you think of him, I'll help you."

"That guy," said Bazin, "is getting too big for his own good. He's got so many people buffaloed he's getting to think he's God Almighty himself. I'm about fed up on him."

"I know," nodded Cervar, "I know. Me, too. Some time—"

Walton appeared in the doorway.

"Are you coming?"

"Yeh," said Cervar, "right away."

They followed him in silence across the sandy waste to the sea.

On the beach, Walton swore at the gray blanket of fog.

"It looks good to me," said Cervar. "You could bring a battleship in through it and nobody'd ever know a thing."

The drone of a ship's siren reached them faintly.

"Is that her?" asked Cervar.

"Shut up," said Walton, "and give us a chance to hear."

The siren sounded repeatedly during the next ten minutes, but far away and never appreciably nearer. A coastwise vessel standing well offshore on account of the fog.

"Southbound," said Walton, dismissing her from consideration.

"What's the last word you had?" asked Bazin. "What time did Mitchell say they'd be here?"

"Between seven and eight, but that wasn't figuring on any fog. It isn't seven thirty yet."

They settled themselves at the foot of a dune, wrapping their coats tight to shut out the chill damp.

Half an hour dragged by with little talk among them.

Walton knocked a cigarette from Cervar's hand.

"Be still," he whispered.

An eye of light glowed dimly through the haze, passed by with a shuffling of feet in the dry sand. A coast guard on beach patrol.

"It's not as thick as it was," said Bazin. "You couldn't have seen his light so well awhile ago."

Walton grunted. It did seem cleared, but far from clear enough to please him. At eight fifteen a siren moaned from the southward.

"That sounds like her," said Walton. "Quiet."

It came more distinctly:

"Oooooh—oo—oo—oooooh!"

"Yes," he said. "I hope she got a flash at Barnegat Light and knows just where she is."

The vessel came on, a tramp out of Havana for New York, feeling her way along close inshore, constantly announcing herself with the prearranged signal, *"Oooooh—oo—oo—oooooh!"*

Presently it seemed to loiter almost abreast of where they stood.

"If Mitchell can only find his way straight in— Damn the fog!"

Five minutes later they made out that the vessel was proceeding.

"We'll spread out," Walton directed. "You fellows go along the beach, one each way. They're liable to hit in a mile away if the tide carries them. Go ahead—and look out for the coast guard."

"Listen," said Cervar, "what's that?"

The thrum of a racing motor broke on them, grew rapidly louder.

"Rum-runner," said Walton.

The tramp's siren seemed to answer him:

"*Oooooh—oo—oo—oooooh!*"

"Or a rum-chaser," said Bazin significantly.

They looked at one another, pondering the inference, then stared blindly into the curtain of fog.

An individual explosion rose above the roar of the motorcraft—another.

"A gun," said Walton.

"Sounds like two of them to me," said Cervar, "two boats, I mean."

Bazin swore. "A tip-off!"

"No," said Walton, "I don't believe it. Anyhow—"

A triphammerlike *brrrr* punctuated his speech—vicious bursts of machine gun fire.

"Anyhow," finished Walton evenly, "we'll wait. There are two boats out there—and they're still traveling."

The siren, fading, hooted:

"*Oooooh—oo—oo—oooooh!*"

CHAPTER III

A Fortune in Drugs

THERE were two men and two heavy suitcases in the dory when it was put over the side of the tramp steamer Robin a mile off shore.

When it rolled in through the surf, forty minutes later, its complement was unchanged—but one of the men was dying.

The boat slued as it hit the beach and grounded on its side. An oar snagged in the sand and snapped. Jerked from the hand of the rower it clipped his chin and but for the quick drawing back of his head would have raked his face.

Doc Mitchell, personal representative of Walton and one-time registered pharmacist, cursed energetically and recklessly, though breathlessly.

Walton and Bazin, some distance apart on the beach, had heard him. They came running.

Mitchell then was overboard, striving to haul the dory up on the beach—and damning the backwash which fought his efforts.

"For God's sake," said Walton, none too quiet himself, "shut up your yelling. What're you trying to do—bring the whole coast guard down on us?"

Recognizing the voice, Mitchell turned to face him.

"I'm trying," he snarled between puffs, "to get this damned boat out of the water. If you'd quit your own hollering and lend a hand you'd be doing something."

Walton laughed.

"Watch me!"

He waded in, the surf swirling to his knees, lending all his strength to secure the dreadful treasure in Mitchell's boat—eighteen hundred ounces of drugs.

There on the beach the drugs represented an outlay of roughly twenty-five thousand dollars. A shade under four dollars an ounce in Hamburg. Six dollars for transportation to and transhipment in Havana. Five dollars from Havana to the Jersey shore.

Fifteen dollars an ounce so far.

With prices ruling high on the Grand Street Curb he could get forty dollars an ounce wholesale for prime stuff in the original German silk-wrapped packages.

Eighteen hundred ounces at forty dollars—

Walton and Bazin, if not Mitchell, pulled with a will to get their seventy-thousand-dollar cargo to safety.

Not until the boat was fully beached, with the incoming tide no more than lapping its stern, did Walton notice the absence of his other agent, a gunman of note.

"Where's Purcell?" he inquired.

"He's there in the boat," said Mitchell, "and near dead the last look I took at him. Something—a machine gun, I guess, ripped half his stomach out. If my ears were any bigger, or my belly any fatter, I'd be alongside him. Cripes! I could feel the slugs bouncing all around me."

Walton bent into the boat, over the huddle that had been Purcell, his hand exploring. He brought the hand away bloody and stooped to cleanse it in the sand.

"Dead," he said. "What happened, Doc? We heard the shooting. How did you get away?"

"You heard it!" scoffed Mitchell. "Yes, and Purcell got it and it damn near took my ears off and the buttons off my coat. We got away because they couldn't see us. How'd you think? You wouldn't want me to tell you I ran away, would you?"

"Suppose," put in Bazin, "we get out of here? It ain't such a swell place to hold a convention."

"Go get Cervar and we'll move," said Walton. "Now, Doc," he said soothingly, "forget you're mad and tell us what happened. If they couldn't see you they weren't shooting at you—is that the idea?"

"That's what," said Mitchell more amiably. "They went past us like bats out of hell. A rum-runner, I suppose, that almost ran over us, then a shower from a machine gun, and then the chaser. If it hadn't been for the fog—"

"Grab hold of one of these grips," said Walton, "and we'll carry them back a ways. We don't want them here if a coast guard shows up."

"What are you going to do with Purcell?"

"We'll think about that."

Walton took up a suitcase; smiled over its weight.

"Why not leave him in the boat," suggested Mitchell, "and shove it off?"

"It wouldn't shove. The tide's coming in. Anyhow, it might not drift far and we don't want him found around here. New York will make him as soon as they see his mug and finger-prints. I'll think of something."

He strode away to deposit the suitcase temporarily among the dunes.

When he returned for the other bag, Bazin and Cervar were there.

"How about the boat?" asked Mitchell. "You going to leave it lay?"

His proposal was echoed by Cervar:

"Shove it off with Purcell in it and let it go."

"The tide is wrong," Walton again pointed out. "We can leave the boat for awhile, but we'll have to take him and dump him somewhere. We'll ditch him within reach of New York—outside Newark—and it'll look like he was taken for a ride or got in a rum battle."

"If," said Bazin, "somebody don't spill that he's been down to Havana."

Walton frowned; Bazin was becoming annoyingly outspoken.

"Who's going to spill it?"

Bazin frowned in return; Walton was on his nerves—and he had a grievance. He and Cervar originally had a six thousand dollar interest in this shipment of dope. They still had, but with a string to it. For six thousand dollars they were entitled to four hundred ounces, yielding a profit of ten thousand dollars. But, caught short of cash a few days ago, they had been

compelled to borrow from Walton. He had let them have the three thousand they required, but only on condition that they sell their share of the drugs to him at thirty dollars an ounce.

That was Walton's way of gambling; if the shipment, for any reason, didn't get through he might have to wait some time for his three grand. To offset the almost non-existent risk he would add four thousand dollars to his own roll at the expense of his partners.

"How do I know?" Bazin answered curtly. "I still think this is a hell of a place to hold a convention."

Walton couldn't argue with that. He turned away.

"Grab that suitcase, Lou," he said. "You"—to Bazin—"give me a lift with Purcell."

They were ready to start when he lowered the body to the beach.

"Drop him a minute," he said, "and help me with the boat."

Bazin stood holding the dead man's feet.

"What are you going to do?"

"Don't ask questions," barked Walton. "You've been hollering about holding conventions. Who wants to hold one now?"

Bazin let down the body and followed him.

Under Walton's direction they shoved the boat back into the water. Standing knee-deep, he dug an oar into the sand and moored the boat to it.

"If the fog holds," he said, "it won't be seen before the tide turns. That'll be about midnight. We can cast it adrift then."

They splashed ashore, resumed their grisly burden and went on.

Crossing the dunes, Mitchell took up the second suitcase. In silence they trudged toward Walton's bungalow.

A few yards from the road, Walton halted beside a grassy hummock.

"We'll leave him here," he said, "till we're ready to ship him."

"Somebody," said Bazin, "is liable to walk on him. The fog is clearing."

"Put him down," said Walton.

Bazin obeyed, but remarked irritatingly, "You're running this," in a way which just as plainly intimated that it was not being run right.

CHAPTER IV

Bazin Rebels

BAZIN'S ill-humor increased as he sat before the fire trying to coax warmth into his chilled feet and legs. His trousers, with those of Cervar and Mitchell, hung from the mantel to dry; their shoes were in a row on the hearth close to the blazing logs.

Walton had found dry clothing and slippers for himself.

Mitchell was swathed in a blanket. Cervar had on a bathrobe of Walton's which fitted him too snugly.

Bazin settled back in his chair and regarded Walton with a thin smile.

"Would it be out of order if I make a suggestion?"

Walton shook his head. "I'm listening."

"Well," said Bazin deliberately, "I think we ought to take a vote on the proposition of whether we go back to town to-night or wait till morning. I've got a hunch—"

"So you said an hour ago," said Walton. "We settled the proposition then."

"You settled it, but—"

"Yes."

"—I didn't hear the rest of us do any settling."

"You weren't invited to."

Bazin glowered, turned to Cervar for support:

"What do you say, Lou? You want to go to-night, don't you?"

"Well—" Cervar squinted at Walton, spoke lamely: "Well, I'd like to. I'd like to get away from here. I don't feel so good with Purcell lying outside. Suppose somebody—"

"Purcell won't be there much longer," said Walton, "so you needn't let him worry you. And, listen here, Eddie, you might as well get this straight and be done with it; we're not going to town to-night. We're not doing any night driving with all that junk aboard. That's that."

Bazin spat through his teeth into the fire; remained with bared teeth, staring at the flames.

"I figure," he asserted, "that I'm taking a bigger chance staying here overnight than I will be driving. Give me my slice of the stuff and I'll take the chance. You going along Lou?"

"Well—" Cervar wriggled his broad shoulders uncertainly. He looked at Walton with an ingratiating grin, "Let's all go, Phil. On the level, Phil, I don't feel so good around here. I got a hunch—"

"It'll be dark on the road," said Walton. "Aren't you afraid to go out in the dark?"

"Sure," grinned Cervar, "but the way I figure is there may be a flock of cops scouting around before morning on account of the shooting out there."

"What have the cops got to do with that? It was out at sea."

"But if they know somebody got shot they'll figure he come ashore and start looking for him. And, seeing this is the only place there's anybody living, they'll get nosey, won't they?"

Walton moved impatiently.

"They don't know any one got shot. You've heard Doc Mitchell say Purcell got hit by stray bullets. The boat that was firing didn't see him and Doc."

"I know," said Cervar, reverting to the very material evidence afforded by the body, "but they'll figure two and two together when they find the stiff. Then they'll come snooping—"

"Oh, hell," ejaculated Walton, "you'll be telling us next that Joe Purcell himself will start hollering for a cop. If he's all that's worrying you we'll get him off the deck." He turned to Bazin: "You want to get to New York, don't you?"

Bazin looked up. "Yes."

"All right—but that elects you to drop Purcell somewhere up Newark way."

Bazin stared, laughed shortly.

"Like hell it does! I'm no undertaker."

"Then," said Walton, "I guess you're not going. How about you, Lou?"

Cervar shook his head. Ride with a corpse!

"Then," said Walton, "I guess you're not going. How do you feel, Doc? Ready to start any time, aren't you?"

Mitchell straightened up.

"Who? Me?" He tried to cry out of it. "Aw, Phil—"

"Your pants are almost dry," said Walton. "The sooner you get started we'll have peace in the house."

Bazin glanced at Cervar and winked. Mitchell was Walton's man. While he remained they would have difficulty in running counter to Walton's wishes. With him gone—

Mitchell grumbled and pleaded, but in the end got into his damp trousers and shoes. Walton had him nailed by

the ears with relation to several affairs. He couldn't disobey.

He left at midnight in Walton's coupé, with the body propped in a corner and supported by an overcoat which was pinned to the cushions. With collar up and hat pulled down it might have been the figure of a sleeping man.

Walton and Cervar stood in the road until the tail-light on the coupé disappeared into the thinning fog. Bazin had refused to leave the house.

"We'll cut the boat loose," said Walton. "The tide should be turning now."

Cervar accompanied him to the beach with worried brows. His concern now was due to Bazin. The little man had a fiery temper once it let go, a wicked streak in him. He was near the boiling point. Anything might happen should he come to an open clash with Walton.

The dory was gone, and the oar to which it had been moored.

"It worked the oar loose riding back and forth in the surf," said Walton, "and went out on the tide. Saves us that much trouble," he added carelessly.

"Yeh," said Cervar—and wished that more potent trouble could be as easily avoided.

When they got back they found Bazin fully dressed and apparently in much better humor. He had the fire piled high and had rustled out the roast chicken, sandwiches and canned goods laid in by Walton to sustain them through the night. The electric percolator was purring.

Walton expressed approval—double. He believed that Bazin had talked things over with himself and decided to be good.

"That coffee smells great, Eddie," he declared genially, "and Oscar himself couldn't have done better with the lunch. I guess we can hang up the God-bless-our-home sign again, huh?"

Bazin smiled. "I didn't know it was down."

"Perhaps not all the way down," smiled Walton, "but it seemed kind of wabbly. I thought it was slipping."

"I didn't notice." Bazin went to disconnect the percolator. "Did Doc get away all right?"

"With Purcell sitting up and looking natural as hell. We're shut of the boat, too; it drifted away."

"Uh-huh."

Cervar sank comfortably into a chair and emitted a little sigh of relief. The tension appeared to have passed.

Walton moved the table closer to the fire and placed chairs.

When he finished eating, Walton went into the kitchen and lit the oil burner in the water heater.

"I don't know what you men are going to do," he said, "but I'm going to grab a tub and hit the hay. It's one o'clock and I want to get away in time to reach the city by noon."

Cervar yawned. "I'll pass the tub, but the hay idea listens good. How about you, Eddie?"

"I'll sit awhile," said Bazin. "Have some more coffee."

Cervar started to say "No." Bazin checked him, signaling for an affirmative.

"Well, all right," said Cervar reluctantly, "I'll have another cup. You want some, Phil?"

Walton, reappearing from the kitchen, declined. He took up the bathrobe Cervar had worn and went to his room.

Cervar leaned forward, whispering:

"What—"

"Ssst!"

Cervar grew nervous His whispered

inquiries received only a savage glance and a commanding gesture to desist.

Bazin got up as Walton splashed into the tub.

"Now," he said, "we'll show him he ain't all the noise in the world. It's time somebody stepped on him."

"But, Eddie, listen," begged Cervar, "don't go and fly off the handle. You know how you are when you get excited. Everything's all right, ain't it? What—"

"Shut up and come on."

Bazin transferred an automatic from his hip to a side pocket. He kept his hand on it.

Cervar caught him by the shoulder.

"Now, listen, Eddie, don't—"

"I won't," said Bazin, "unless he asks for it. But I'm through letting that guy ride me."

He jerked loose from Cervar's restraining hand and headed for the bathroom.

Cervar waggled his hands helplessly. He didn't know what to do, whether to yell a warning to Walton or keep still. Both men dominated him. And while Walton was the Big Shot, Cervar had come more directly under the influence of Bazin and in his heart was perhaps more afraid of him.

Lying in the tub, Walton glanced up as Bazin halted in the doorway. The set expression on Bazin's face informed him that there was dynamite in the air; that Bazin had been playing a part to lull him into a position of disadvantage. And what a position he had placed himself in!

But having had his own way for so long, accustomed to giving orders and having them obeyed, he still believed that he could control the situation. Habit was strong—and Bazin was in the habit of doing as he was told.

"Hello, Eddie," said Walton casually. "You can get me a little drink if you like. Make it high, will you?"

Bazin's clenched teeth showed in a grimace.

"Get you nothing! I've quit carrying for you. Remember I said I was going to New York to-night? Well, I am."

Walton sat up, leaned an arm on the side of the tub, drew up his knees.

"Well," he said quietly, "why come and tell me about it? Why didn't you simply walk out? You'd have been gone before I knew it. I certainly couldn't have run after you naked—and I haven't any car, anyhow. You're going to hi-jack the stuff, I suppose. You've been acting crazy enough to do that. Hello, Lou"—as Cervar appeared behind Bazin—"you in this, too?"

Cervar mumbled unintelligibly.

"He is," said Bazin. "You're right both times. We're taking the stuff. You blackjacked us, didn't you, when we needed a coupla grand the other day—took everything but our shirts? Well, here's where we leave you without a shirt for a minute. See how you like it."

Walton laughed unpleasantly.

"Help yourself. I can't stop you—not now, but I'm not saying anything about later."

Bazin also laughed in a similarly unpleasant fashion.

"What you want to do," he said, "is get the idea out of your head that you're the big foot and everybody else is a bunch of heels to walk on. If there's any stopping going to be done I can do some, too."

"Yes?"

Walton hoisted himself quickly to his feet. Bazin whipped out his gun.

"Get back in there and sit still. I

don't want to give it to you, but if you're looking for them here's the works all ready. Lie down."

Walton shook his head, that snarling grin on his lips.

"Eddie," said Cervar nervously, "listen, Eddie—"

"Grab him, Lou," said Walton. "Grab him!"

He gathered himself to spring as he saw Cervar's arms rise in involuntary response.

"Grab him, Lou!" mocked Bazin. "That's you, Walton, all the time getting somebody else to do it for you. Well, this is one time you don't. Lou ain't going to grab me—not if he wants to live. Are you, Lou?"

With the question he turned swiftly and for an instant jabbed the gun into Cervar's stomach.

"Ugh!" grunted Cervar, his arms falling. "No! But, Eddie—"

Bazin turned again to cover Walton.

In that brief moment of respite Walton moved to save himself, but the time was too short. He had one foot on the floor when the gun checked him.

He stood like that, half in the tub, his beady eyes probing Bazin's, making up his mind whether Bazin could be bluffed down or would shoot.

He raised his other foot tentatively.

"Stay where you are," rapped Bazin. "Get back in the tub."

"I don't want to," said Walton, still raising his foot. "I'm getting out."

Bazin stepped closer, the gun pointing at Walton's middle.

"Get in!"

"No," said Walton.

His foot reached the edge of the tub. He braced himself, muscles taut, but was unable to decide whether to proceed with his bluff. He doubted the wisdom of that. Bazin looked as if he would shoot.

They were within arms' length of each other. He could leap on Bazin with a single motion—but Bazin had drawn back by his side and his finger was tight on the trigger.

Walton looked at Cervar standing anxiously in the doorway.

"Grab him, Lou," he urged again, "knock him over!"

Cervar wet his lips, wagged his head.

"I'll knock you over," said Bazin.

His left hand lashed out, pushing. It struck Walton's shoulder, upset his uncertain balance. He fell backward against the wall, then down on his side, his cheek striking the rim of the tub. He came to rest face downward in the water.

Scrambling to hands and knees, he shook the water from eyes and ears, spat out a mouthful.

Looking up he found Bazin standing over him; took time to catch his breath.

His fury remained cold. Convinced that Bazin would go the limit if pushed, he gave up all idea of opposing him further in any way. To-morrow would be another day—and he wanted to see it.

"You win," he said with poison in his twisted grin. "If you think you can go through with this all the way, go and take the stuff. I'm licked—just now."

"You're licked," said Bazin, "for good."

"We'll see."

Walton made to turn over, to sit down.

Bazin put a hand on the back of his head and ducked him.

"You're licked," he repeated as Walton emerged sputtering, "for good. Get that right."

Still on hands and knees, Walton told him off.

"You—"

Bazin ducked Walton's head again and held it under.

Walton fought for air, arms thrusting, legs threshing, feet kicking to find purchase against the end of the tub.

Pocketing the gun, Bazin weaved both hands into Walton's hair and applied all his wiry strength to hold him down.

With thought of retaining some measure of standing with Walton, Cervar came forward.

"Lay off him, Eddie, he can't do anything. You've got him licked. There's no sense—"

Walton got foothold. His shoulders heaved up and he strained to get his head above water.

"Grab him, you fool," panted Bazin. "Get his feet away from there and hold them. He can't do anything now, but what's he going to do to-morrow? He ain't going to forget this, you dumb-bell. He'll have us both knocked off before we're a week older. Grab his feet and gimme a hand."

Cervar vacillated between two masters, two fires. He realized that Bazin was about to kill Walton.

That wasn't so good, either, but what could he do? If he went to Walton's assistance there was the chance that Bazin would kill him, too. He, of course, might kill Bazin, but it seemed preferable that if some one must get it, that one should be Walton. For Walton might not be properly appreciative of the belated rescue; might figure that since Cervar had gone against him for a time he was not to be trusted henceforth.

Also, there was an item of seventy thousand dollars' worth of drugs to be considered. If Walton survived and proved to be forgiving, Cervar would be entitled to only a small share of the dope. With Walton out of the way, it would be a fifty-fifty proposition with Bazin.

Bazin swore furiously as Walton brought up a hand and felt for his windpipe; but he kept Walton's head under.

"Get him, Lou," he puffed. "What the hell are you standing around for? Get him or he'll be out of here and we'll have to plug him."

The idea reached Cervar, dazed him for a moment.

"You're going to drown him!" he gasped.

"I'm not giving him a bath," snarled Bazin. "Help me!"

Cervar moved slowly, took hold of Walton's ankles, wondering if there was not another way out; if murder could not be averted. He could see no way. It was a case of kill Walton or be killed.

Pulling Walton's feet away from the end of the tub, he bent them backward till they touched the hips.

Walton collapsed, flattened against the bottom of the tub.

They held him there.

CHAPTER V

Drowned

CERVAR backed away suddenly. He shuddered as Walton's feet eased out of the water with the contraction of the stretched muscles.

His voice was rusty. "I want a drink."

Bazin looked round at him, observed his pale face and popping eyes.

"You do," he said coolly. "Well, get it."

Cervar fumbled his hands together, wiped them on his coat.

"L-let him up, Eddie. L-let's not—"

"Get your drink," said Bazin, "and

stop your bawling. Get a jolt into yourself and we'll get this thing over with and get out of here. It's too late to start bawling now, understand. He's through."

"Through," said Cervar dully, "yeh. Yeh, I guess—I guess I'll get a drink."

He remained, nervously rubbing his hands on his coat.

Bazin untwined his fingers from Walton's hair and reached for a towel. Calmly drying his hands he watched the man in the tub for some sign of life.

Walton lay inert, face downward; only his feet, grotesquely drooping, above water.

"I guess," said Cervar in the same dull tone, shuddering again, "I guess he's out. I guess I'll get a drink."

"You don't have to guess about him," said Bazin, "and guessing about the drink won't get it into you. Come on. I can stand a couple myself."

He shoved Cervar ahead of him to the living room and poured drinks—in tumblers.

Cervar gulped the liquor and dropped into a chair. It steadied him, brought some color to his cheeks while cold moisture gathered on his forehead.

Grinning sickishly, he aped Bazin's callousness.

"A fast idea, Eddie, fast and hot. Bathtubs ought to come under the Sullivan law—they're deadly weapons, ain't they? Look at all the people get drowned in them."

Bazin poured another drink.

"That ain't the idea."

"What ain't?"

"Drowning in the bathtub," said Bazin. "There ain't so many people drown in them, and when they do they mean it, most of them. It wouldn't look good to leave him like he went out that way."

"Why not?"

"It wouldn't, that's all. He's not the kind to drown himself in a tub or anywhere else. Somebody would start hollering it was phony and they'd want to know what the hell we were doing when it happened."

"We were asleep."

"No. We weren't here—that's how we'll have to fix it."

"All right," said Cervar, "we weren't here and he fell down in the bathtub and banged his head or was drunk or something and drowned himself. If we weren't here that let's us out."

"We can make it look better than that."

"How?"

Bazin motioned outdoors.

"There's plenty of water out there. We'll drop him off the dock."

Cervar frowned thoughtfully; got up to replenish his glass.

Bazin put a hand in front of the bottle.

"No more now, Lou. You've just had a couple of shots that'll hold you for awhile. We've got to know what we're doing—watch our step."

"Another shot won't hurt me."

"It might."

"Why, I don't even feel what I've had."

"It's taking hold; you'll feel it soon enough." Bazin's lips drew back in a tight grin: "Save the next shot for a couple of minutes. You'll need it more then. We've got to dress him."

"Dress him!" Cervar shrank from the repulsive task: "What for?"

"You wouldn't throw him overboard naked, would you?"

"I wouldn't throw him overboard at all. I'd leave him where he is."

"I wouldn't—and we won't. Go fetch his clothes. We want to get away from here soon as we can."

Cervar's nerves ran away again. He wiped sweat from his brow with trembling hand.

"Jeese, Eddie, I don't see why—"

"I do. It'll look better, I tell you. Anybody might fall off that crazy dock of his; the planks are all loose. We'll say he was drunk when we left here, and that'll cover everything. Here"—he handed over the bottle—"throw one into you and do as I say. I know what I'm doing."

Cervar swallowed another generous portion. It picked him up, but thickened his tongue.

"All right, Eddie, sure you know. All right"—he told himself he could be as tough as the next man—"let's go."

Bazin went about the business of removing the body from the tub, straightening it on the floor and dressing it, with the cold unconcern of an undertaker.

Before it was accomplished Cervar had to fortify himself with several additional drinks.

He was putting on Walton's shoes when Bazin stopped him.

"Huh?" Cervar was getting drunk: "Gotta have shoes, don't he? What'd he be doin' out in his socks?"

"Slippers," said Bazin. "They're in his room. I'll bring them."

"What's the matter with his shoes?"

"You'll see."

Cervar nodded with half-drunken resignation.

"Oh, all right, anything you want, Eddie, anything at all."

He regarded the body critically while Bazin was out of the room.

The coat was open. He buttoned it with clumsy fingers.

He became flippant.

"Looks natural, don't he, Eddie? Put a lily in his hand and—"

"Save the comedy," said Bazin sharply, "and take his feet."

"Natural as hell," Cervar persisted, "all 'cept the bump on his jaw. Where'd he get that, Eddie? You sock him?"

Bazin snarled with impatience:

"Take his feet and shut up, you fool. He rapped his face on the tub."

Cervar muttered as they took up the body, but said no more.

"The back door," said Bazin. "Out through the kitchen."

A breeze had sprung up and driven the fog back to sea. There was starlight, but no moon.

With Cervar making somewhat heavy going, they went down the uneven path from the bungalow to the bay, fifty yards distant.

The path led to a rickety jetty which Bazin had fittingly described as crazy. The planking was uneven and broken in places; the guard rails were loose and rotten.

Halfway out, some thirty feet, Bazin called a halt.

"Why not put him over the end?" asked Cervar.

"Because," said Bazin tartly, "this has got to look like an accident, see, and not a parade. Put him down and don't ask fool questions."

He felt on the floor of the jetty until he found a plank protruding above its neighbor. Into the crevice he stuck the toe of one of Walton's slippers and left it there.

A few feet away he broke the railing.

"All right," he said, "let's dump him."

"It's pretty shallow here," demurred Cervar.

"It's deep enough to drown a drunk who fell pretty hard before going in. And he probably won't lay right here; the tide should suck him out a ways. Turn him over so he'll land face down. All right. Let her go."

He knelt to peer at the vague shape in the shallow water three feet below.

"Hey!" exclaimed Cervar, dangerously loud. "Get up, Eddie, quick! Here's a car coming. Who—"

Bazin jumped to his feet.

An automobile was just turning in from the highway.

"Run!" he ordered. "Keep your head down and run for the house. And keep out of these headlights!"

The bungalow protected them from the glare.

They entered the kitchen as the car stopped at the front door.

A woman laughed in high pitch.

Bazin swore. Locked the door.

"That damned woman! That—"

"Chee-Chee!" said Cervar. "My God, suppose—"

"Chee-Chee," said Bazin. "Standing here supposing won't get us anything. We've got to talk with her."

CHAPTER VI

Chee-Chee's Return

BAZIN opened the front door as Chee-Chee came onto the veranda.

"Hello," he said evenly. "What brings you back?"

She ruffled her sables, looked up at him. "I don't know as it's anything to you," she said. "But I want to see Walton."

"You saw him only a couple of hours ago. Where you been?"

"Listen, big boy," she rasped. "I went from here to Lakewood, and then to Tom's River, and all the time I was gettin' madder. That big bum can't scare me. I'm going to tell him where to get off!"

Chee-Chee, as a matter of fact, had advertised her ire in both the road houses she and Charlie Malling had stopped at. As she got more drunk she got louder.

At the Lighthouse Inn, in Tom's River, she had shrieked out, "I'll kill the crook!"

Malling had finally brought her back to Walton's bungalow to keep her quiet.

"I want to see Walton now!" she cried.

Bazin didn't move off the door sill.

"He said to tell you if you showed up that he'll expect a call from you at four to-morrow afternoon—this afternoon. He went to New York two hours ago."

"He did! Well, go on in and tell him I'm calling now and I'm going to see him if I have to stay here all night. Hey, Lou"—as she saw Cervar wandering restlessly about the room—"tell Walton to come out; I want to see him."

Cervar wagged his head.

"Like Eddie says—"

"He's gone to New York," said Bazin quickly. He stepped out of the doorway and gestured invitingly: "You don't have to take my word for it, Chee-Chee. Come in and look for yourself."

She entered suspiciously.

"What's the trick? You held me up with a lot of talk, didn't you, while he got out the back window?"

"No," said Bazin, "he didn't. Didn't you see that his car is gone? He couldn't take that out the window with him."

She hadn't noted the absence of

Walton's coupé, but accepted the fact as possible evidence that he had really departed.

"Who did he go with? Cranby?"

"No-o."

His slight hesitancy injured his credibility.

"Who with?" she pressed.

"Alone," said Bazin. "He went alone."

Her gaze fastened on the sturdy triple-locked suitcases. She surmised what they contained.

"No," she said, "he hasn't gone. If he was, that stuff would be gone, too."

Bazin looked puzzled. "Stuff?"

"Yes, stuff. I'm not dumb."

"Everything is wide open," said Bazin. "If you've an idea you can find Walton here, go ahead and look."

She pointed across the room.

"There's his coat and hat."

"He wore a cap?" said Bazin.

"Why not his coat?"

"How do I know. Because he didn't want to, I suppose."

"Because he's still somewhere around here, you mean. You've been down to the water, haven't you?"

"Water!" said Cervar, startled.

"Water," said Bazin, eying her. "I don't get you."

She indicated their wrinkled trousers and stained shoes.

"After these grips, weren't you? Is that where he is now—on the beach for more stuff?"

"I've just told you he's in New York."

"Without his hat or coat! Probably in his bare feet, too, isn't he?"

Bazin swore to himself. Cervar made a choking sound. They glanced at each other with the same thought—that Walton's shoes were on the bathroom floor.

"I'm getting tired telling you," said Bazin, "he's in New York."

"Liar." She dropped her coat back off her shoulders, recrossed her knees, and disposed herself more comfortably. "Oh, very well, I'll wait till he gets mad enough to come out and show himself. I'm in no hurry."

"You'll have a long wait."

She suddenly recalled Bazin's invitation:

"You said I could look through the house for myself. I guess I'll do that."

Bazin gestured carelessly.

Looking into the bathroom, she exclaimed:

"There! His shoes, aren't they? Now go ahead and tell me that he has gone to New York in his bare feet!"

Bazin laughed at her.

"Don't be an idiot. He put on dry shoes, of course."

"Sure he did," said Cervar with over-emphasis. "He took a hot bath and put on dry clothes and shoes."

That sounded plausible, and she had nothing with which to attack it.

"It looks," she said, for want of anything better, "as if he bathed on the floor."

"I didn't bathe him," said Bazin, "so can't tell. You've seen all there is to see. I'm sorry we can't do the hat trick and produce Walton for you. I expect he's in bed by this time. That's where I'm going now. Make yourself at home if you want to wait for him. He'll be back the day after tomorrow."

Bazin went down the hall to the living room door and stood there until she came up to him.

"There's a bottle of rum," he said, edging her into the room, "and logs for the fire. Make yourself comfortable. Here, Lou, take one of these grips to bed with you."

Chee-Chee laughed as they took up the suitcases.

"You afraid I'll walk out with them?"

"No," said Bazin from the door, "I'm not, because you won't get the chance. Good night."

Left alone, she walked about for a few minutes, pondering, then went out to talk the situation over with Malling.

"If Walton is hiding," said Malling, "he will not come out while you are here. That is reasonable, is it not?"

"Yes."

"If he will not come out there is nothing to be gained by waiting."

"No."

"And his car is not here. That is something."

"You think he really has gone to New York?"

"It is not improbable that he departed, as they told you he did, to avoid another interview with you."

"But they said he left word for me to phone him this afternoon."

"Walton may have thought better of it and decided to talk things over in a quieter way."

"Maybe you're right, honey, but we'll wait awhile and see if anything happens. That Bazin is a smooth crook and a cold fish. He did all the talking—wouldn't let Cervar open his mouth. And Cervar was jumpy. Yes, we'll wait. Walton may only be down the shore somewhere. Put out the lights so he won't see us if he does come back."

The dash clock showed twenty minutes to three.

By three thirty, her head on Malling's shoulder, Chee-Chee Lamar was dozing.

Nothing had happened. Excepting the living room the bungalow was dark. Bazin and Cervar apparently had gone to sleep.

"I guess," yawned Chee-Chee, "we might as well go. I'm cold. You must be freezing, honey."

"Yes," he said, which answered both her remarks.

He switched on the lights, started the motor, backed round to the side of the bungalow, and pulled out to the highway.

Bazin, sitting by a bedroom window, stopped swearing to voice a fervent "Thank God!"

Cervar, stretched across the bed, snored.

Bazin let him sleep while he walked to the road to make sure that Chee-Chee had not merely shifted position to draw him out. He saw the light on her car streaking away toward Point Pleasant.

At four o'clock he and Cervar left the bungalow in darkness, loaded the suitcases with their seventy thousand dollars' worth of dope into the car and rolled away.

"That jane," said Cervar, "is going to want in on this. She'll know we got the stuff. What you going to do if she declares herself in?"

Bazin lifted the speedometer to fifty.

"I'll tell her to go to hell. We're not cutting with everybody in town. There's Doc Mitchell to take care of. He's enough."

"Yeh, that's right. But say, Eddie, Doc's pretty strong for Walton. You don't suppose he'll raise a yell and start something?"

"What's he going to start? What's anybody going to start that they can finish? Doc'll take his cut and keep his face shut. Walton fell in the lake and got drowned. What's anybody going to do about it?"

"Yeh," said Cervar, but his tone

carried less assurance than hope, "that's right, too—I guess."

CHAPTER VII

The Investigation

A CLAM fisherman going down the bay at daybreak saw the body on the shore beside the jetty. It lay where it had been thrown in, but was now well out of the water. An arm had hooked on a spile and prevented the receding tide from carrying it out.

Putting in to the jetty the clammer tied up his boat and got out. Stopping only to make sure that Walton was beyond aid he went on to the bungalow. Finding it open but unoccupied, he returned to his boat and chugged up the bay to the nearest village to notify the State police. Then he went back to Walton's.

Within ten minutes two motorcycles came roaring up the road and whirled in to the bungalow in the breakneck fashion which marks the State constabulary.

A sergeant and a trooper swung from the machines as they ground to a halt, and the investigation of Phil Walton's death was under way.

On the face of it there didn't appear to be any great need for investigation. The snagged slipper and the broken railing seemed to tell the story.

The troopers took in the visible evidence intelligently.

"Walking back off the dock when he fell," commented the sergeant; the slipper being pointed in that direction. "Is that his boat?"

"No," said Rogers, "it's mine. I was passing by and saw him. There wasn't any boat here."

"Who is he?"

"A summer feller."

They jumped down beside the body.

"Sort of shallow water for a man to drown in," remarked the trooper. He pointed to the green scum on the piles. "There isn't much more than a foot of water when the tide is full."

The sergeant nodded. "I see that, but a foot of water is a lot sometimes. He may have banged his head when he fell. Turn him over. No, wait a minute while I take a couple of shots at him."

He unlimbered a camera from his belt and photographed the body.

"Now turn him over. There, see" —putting a finger on the bruise on Walton's cheek—"he did bang himself. I wonder what he was doing on the dock. A dizzy place to go walking at night with all these loose boards on it."

"Rum, I suppose," said the trooper. "They may have brought a cargo up and stored it in his house."

"The others would have heard him fall and fished him out. Maybe not, though. He might have stayed on the dock a minute after they pushed off. We'll see if he's got any papers."

"Wait," said the trooper. "That's funny, ain't it?"

"What?"

"His coat. See; it's double-breasted, and it's buttoned wrong side to."

"He must've been stewed," said the sergeant, unbuttoning the coat, "or else a woman buttoned it for him."

Letters and an automobile license furnished identification.

"Phil Walton," ruminated the sergeant, "I know the name. I've seen it in the papers. Let's take a couple more pictures and then we'll see what's in the house."

They climbed back on the jetty and photographed the slipper and the broken railing. Rogers wanted to be off to his clam-digging.

"You need me any more?"

"No, I guess not. All you know is that you saw him here and came in, isn't it?"

"That's all."

"What time was that?"

"Five thirty about."

"All right. Let's have your name and you can go."

The troopers went into the bungalow.

The sergeant jerked a thumb at the bottle and glasses in the living room.

"Had company, apparently. That's probably what took him on the dock—seeing them off. If we don't find a load of liquor, as you suggested."

Search revealed one half-empty case of liquor of the same brand as the bottle on the table.

"That settles that," said the sergeant. "This is only his private stock." He sampled it. "Good stuff, too."

The trooper also sampled and similarly declared.

"There were five of them," he said, counting the used glasses, "but it don't seem to have been much of a drinking bout. There's only this one bottle."

The sergeant was peering out. "Here's a car coming—the coroner."

They went with him while he examined the body.

"Drowning," he pronounced. "Hmmm." He contemplated the high-tide mark on the piles.

"Must have knocked himself out, eh, doc?" said the sergeant. "Hit his face when he fell."

"I can't see how that could have rendered him insensible," said the doctor. "The bruise is on the cheek bone. Of course, it might have jarred his brain but—hmmm."

"Wet sand is pretty hard," said the trooper. "I've seen a man break his neck diving. If this fellow went over head first he could have put himself out."

"I was thinking of that," said the doctor. "Yes, it's quite probable that's what happened. Who and what is he?"

His brows went up when they said, "Walton."

"And the circumstances?"

"A clam-digger found him there; that's all we know so far except that Walton had some visitors. We'll hunt them up. How long has he been dead, doc?"

"Oh, a few hours. Anywhere from two to five. I might favor the longer period."

"Uh-huh. Chances are he was a little bit tight. There's what's left of a case of liquor in the house."

"Yes," said the doctor. "You can take him inside until the undertaker comes. It appears to be a plain case of drowning. I don't at the moment see any necessity for a complete autopsy. We'll let that go until you find your witnesses."

They placed the body on Walton's bed—removing, as they did so, a suit of clothes which lay there.

CHAPTER VIII

Close to the Edge

BAZIN had a caller the next morning at his apartment. It was Doc Mitchell. He brought a newspaper with him which blatantly displayed the news of Phil Walton's death. Bazin read it while he drank some coffee. Cervar was still snoring in bed.

One thing in the newspaper account disturbed Bazin. The police were looking for the visitors that Walton had had before his death.

"Well," he said finally to Mitchell, "what do you want?"

Mitchell wanted one thing very bad-

ly. He wanted his cut on the drugs. He knew damn well, he said, that Bazin had taken the suitcases. He wanted twenty thousand dollars. Bazin said he'd give him fifteen; they wrangled. And Mitchell finally left, grumbling.

Bazin did learn from him, before he went, that he had dumped Purcell's body out of the car, the night before, near Perth Amboy.

"He began to give me the willies," Mitchell said. "I couldn't wait until Newark."

When Mitchell had gone, Bazin went back to the newspaper report. Finally he got up and put in a long distance call to Jersey.

A few minutes later he was shaking Cervar's shoulders.

"We're going back to Jersey, Lou," he said.

Cervar looked startled.

"What the hell for?"

"I just called the State cops up"—he gestured reassuringly when Cervar sprang up with a look of terror in his face—"they want to talk to Walton's visitors. It 'll look better for us to go right down there. Don't get scared. They haven't got a thing. It was an accident, they told me so on the phone."

So Bazin and Cervar started for Tom's River.

"Only one thing's makin' me nervous," Bazin confided. "That's Chee-Chee Lamar."

"What can she do?"

"Talk."

"What about?"

"The drugs, you fool. She knows damn well what Walton's racket was. If Chee-Chee begins shooting her mouth, seventy thousand dollars' worth of drugs we got locked up in our apartment in those suitcases may go all to hell."

"Yeh. That's right."

"She better not talk, though. Chee-Chee's in bad herself. Listen, remember what we heard her say when she left Walton yesterday? 'I'll get you, big boy!'"

"Yeh. I remember."

"Chee-Chee came back to see Walton again. Didn't she?"

"Yeh, that's right. She came back, but she didn't see him. That was after—after—"

"The hell she didn't. She saw him—see—and had another fight with him. She left again sayin' she'd get him. Then we left the bungalow. After that—how do we know Chee-Chee didn't come back a third time, and kill him?"

Cervar looked puzzled a moment. Finally he nodded. "Yeh. I see. But listen, she'll deny it of course."

"What of it? Ain't we two witnesses against her word?"

But it was not in Bazin's plan to involve Chee-Chee unless that should seem essential to his own safety. He honestly hoped that the necessity would not arise. His real endeavor would be to have the case disposed of as suicide or accident with an open verdict of "Found Drowned."

During the three-hour ride to Tom's River he coached Cervar ceaselessly on that point; and drummed into him also that he could best serve their interests by confiding himself to a judicious corroboration if called upon.

"The less you have to say, Lou," he reiterated as they neared the State police post, "the better we'll make out. Keep on telling that to yourself and then you'll be too busy to talk to anybody else."

Cervar's nerves were none too steady. He had little stomach for this invasion of the lion's den.

"God knows I don't crave a lot of

conversation from these birds. If we can get by with you doing all the talking, I'm satisfied. I wish to hell you hadn't been so smart in talking us in here. We should've stayed out when we were out."

"We couldn't do that," said Bazin, "and you've got to be a damn fool not to admit it. I've told you half a dozen times that we've got to show up. They know he had company last night. If somebody didn't admit being there the whole thing would look phony, wouldn't it?"

"What if it did?" rumbled Cervar. "How're they to know who called on him? Who'd tell them it was us?"

"How do they ever know anything? Who ever tells them anything?" Bazin slapped the steering wheel to vent his aggravation. "Suppose we'd done as you want, and kept still. Where would we be when the Lamar dame steps up and talks? And she ain't the only one. Cranby and Sanger both know we were there. Cranby would tell, if nobody else did. Wasn't he Walton's lawyer?"

"Oh, all right," said Cervar sullenly, "I suppose you're right. I was just saying what I think."

"Let me do the thinking," said Bazin. "Here we are now. Look sad if you want to, but not so damn gloomy. You look like you're on your way to the chair."

Cervar scowled at the police barracks in front of which they were stopping.

"Maybe I feel that way," he muttered.

Lieutenant Pearson of the State Police was waiting to take their statements.

On the evidence, this seemed to be no more than a formality. There was nothing so far to upset the presumption that Walton had met death by drowning due to misadventure. The circumstances, as indicated by the slipper caught between the loose planks on the jetty, seemed plain to read.

"You men were the last to see him alive," said the lieutenant when they were seated in his office. "Tell us about that—what shape he was in, what time it was, and everything. That ought to complete the record."

"You know who he was, of course," said Bazin.

"Yes. We got all that from the New York police. You're Bazin, aren't you? What's the front name and address?"

As he replied for both Cervar and himself, Bazin glanced at the stenographer sitting unobtrusively to one side.

"Occupation?" asked the lieutenant.

"Broker."

"Stockbroker?"

"Well, no." Bazin smiled. "I'm not any special kind of a broker—just a broker. Real estate or anything that looks good."

"It's a broad term," remarked the lieutenant. "New York seems to be under the impression that your business is something like Walton's, and they listed him as a gambler. I asked the police if they knew anything about you after you phoned that you were coming here."

"No harm in that," said Bazin with the virtue of a man who never has been arrested for serious crime and never has been convicted of anything. "They told you, probably, that I've been taken in a couple of times in gambling raids. There's not much to that, is there?"

"Not ordinarily." He caught the black look which Cervar shot at Bazin. "They said much the same about you, Mr. Cervar, with the addition that

you were convicted of felonious assault in 1909 and served four years."

"That," said Bazin, "was a long time ago. Lou got a raw deal there. It was a case of self-defense."

Cervar mumbled, scowling.

"You're a broker, too, I suppose," said the lieutenant.

"I'm retired," barked Cervar. "What's that got to do with anything?"

Bazin coughed, tapped with his foot.

"Only to identify you," said the lieutenant. "About Walton, now. What time did you men leave him?"

"Between three thirty and four," said Bazin.

"How near four?"

"Perhaps a quarter of. About then."

"You, Mr. Cervar, do you remember the exact time?"

Cervar shook his head.

"Call it a quarter of four," said Bazin. "That's close enough. You asked what shape Walton was in. Well, he was pretty drunk. We tried to put him to bed, but he wouldn't go. Lou, here," he chuckled, "was a bit under the weather himself."

"You were sober?"

"Mostly. I didn't drink so much because I knew some of us had to drive back to town."

"Just how drunk was Walton?"

"Oh, he was able to navigate, if that's what you mean. He could get around, but his feet were heavy."

"You left him in the house?"

"Yes, sure."

"Then he must have gone out after you left—down to the dock where he fell in?"

"Why, yes, sure. Last we saw of him he said he was going to sleep. We figured he would after we got out. You know how a drunk will settle down if he's left by himself."

"Frequently. Walton had on his slippers—"

"That's right," said Bazin. "We tried to get him undressed and into bed, but that was as far as we got—taking off his shoes."

"They were water soaked," said the lieutenant. "How did that happen?"

"Uh"—Bazin hesitated an instant—"that was in the evening. We were down on the beach."

"On the beach," nodded the lieutenant.

"Taking a walk," said Bazin.

"In the fog."

"Well, yes, it was foggy."

Pearson laughed. Bazin grinned without great confidence that he was grinning in the right place. Cervar moved restlessly, sulky.

"We asked New York," said the lieutenant, "if Walton did anything in the rum-running line. They said it was quite likely. You don't know, do you?"

Bazin wagged his head. "I never heard of it if he did."

"No? That might have been what took him onto the beach in the fog. It was a good day for running stuff."

"No, nothing like that, lieutenant, you can take my word. All we did was take a walk. Lou and I felt like walking on the beach; that's how it happened."

"I see. When did you come down from the city?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"For no particular reason?"

"Only to visit Phil. He asked us down—said he was lonesome as hell. He'd been there two or three days."

"Alone?"

"I guess so. He was sort of hiding out, you understand, ducking a woman."

"Why?"

"A pest," said Bazin, "who thought she owned him and got sore when he gave her the gate. A Broadway gold-digger, Chee-Chee Lamar. She was there yesterday with her lawyer threatening to sue him for a million dollars or something."

"Chee-Chee Lamar," said the lieutenant, "and her lawyer. Who is he?"

"Emil Sanger."

"Who else was at the party?"

"Phil Walton's lawyer, Cranby—G. C. Cranby."

"Somebody wasn't drinking. Who was that?"

"Huh?" Bazin wrinkled his brows, really puzzled. "I don't get you."

"There were six of you," explained the lieutenant, "and only five glasses. Who was the dry?"

Bazin's face cleared and he laughed. "I get you now, but you haven't got it straight, lieutenant. There wasn't any party, except for Lou and Phil and myself. Lamar and her lawyer were going away when Lou and I arrived and Cranby went right after them. See?"

"What time was that—when you arrived?"

"About six."

Pearson reflected and made a connection.

"What time were you on the beach?"

"Maybe an hour later."

"You weren't there about eight thirty or nine o'clock?"

"Uh-uh. We only took a little walk for ten or fifteen minutes."

"You didn't hear firing offshore?"

"Not a thing. Did you, Lou?"

Cervar shook his head.

"Why," asked Bazin, "did somebody get shot up?"

The lieutenant studied him, smiled faintly.

"The coast guard did some shooting and have asked us to look out for a wounded man. The boat they were chasing got away— Where were we? Oh, yes. So after six o'clock there was nobody in the house but you two and Walton?"

"That's it," said Bazin. "No, it ain't, either. Lamar came back around two o'clock and talked with Phil."

"What about?"

"Well, now, I don't know. They went in another room."

"Her lawyer was still with her?"

"No. He didn't come in the house, anyhow. She didn't stay long."

"You said she was threatening to sue him for a million dollars. Did they quarrel over that?"

"I didn't listen."

Pearson asked Cervar: "Did you?" and received a short "No."

"Did they quarrel on her first visit?"

"We don't know," said Bazin. "That was all over when we got there and Phil didn't talk about it."

"And you didn't hear anything at all that was said on her second visit? You couldn't tell by her appearance whether she was mad or not?"

"I didn't pay much attention to her, although I did notice she'd had a few drinks. All I heard her say outside of hello and good-by, was something about coming back. That was as she was going out. I didn't quite get it."

The lieutenant looked at Cervar. "You didn't hear anything?"

Cervar gave him another curt "No."

"Lou," smiled Bazin, "had a good start by then. It was after she was there that Phil Walton began filling up. I guess something she said must have made him get drunk."

"You haven't seen the woman since then?"

"No. If you want to talk with her

she's got an apartment on Fifty-Seventh Street. I don't know the number, but her lawyer should be able to tell you. You've got his name—Emil Sanger."

"Yes."

Mentally reviewing his interrogation, the lieutenant felt that it covered the ground. He added suicide now as an alternative theory. Walton, in a maudlin condition, might have drowned himself on account of the woman.

That he believed Bazin to be lying in spots, did not affect his credence in the recital insofar as it touched solely upon Walton's last hours. He couldn't expect Bazin or Cervar to admit that their visit to the beach had to do with the coming ashore of a cargo of rum.

Even if it had been so, the fact was irrelevant. This was not an investigation into rum-running, but an inquiry into a simple case of drowning.

"There'll be an inquest," he said, "probably to-morrow. You'll be wanted at it."

"We'll stay over for it," said Bazin. "Where is Phil?"

"At the undertaker's."

Bazin rubbed a hand over his eyes.

"He was a good fellow, lieutenant, and a game sport. A good gambler. Can we see him?"

"If you—"

Cervar reared to his feet with a blistering oath, his face working.

The lieutenant stared at him.

Bazin snarled silently at him.

Cervar clasped a hand to his jaw.

"Toothache," he said, his gaze scorching Bazin. "Of all the—"

With not even remote reference to toothache he enlarged extensively on that speech when they got outside.

"What's the matter?" said Bazin. "You gone crazy? We got over big, didn't we?"

"You're crazy yourself," snorted Cervar, "if you think you're going to get me into that undertaker's to look at him. I've had enough out of listening to you stalling along with that cop. I'm going to find me a couple of drinks."

CHAPTER IX

Keep Your Head Down

CHEE-CHEE LAMAR then was awakening in Atlantic City whither she had continued upon driving away from Walton's bungalow at three thirty in the morning.

Becomingly clad in orchid pyjamas and ermine-trimmed booties—she was gazing peacefully over the sunlit sea and telling Malling how she'd make Walton stand on his head, when the whole prospect went dark.

A newspaper was brought up with their breakfast-luncheon. She tossed it aside and applied herself to the grapefruit juice.

Malling unfolded the paper to glance at the headlines. He immediately became absorbed.

"What," she asked casually, "is all the big news?"

He told her in three words:

"Walton is dead."

"Dead!" she screeched incredulously, her face suddenly frozen.

"Dead," he repeated, "and perhaps if we had not gone back—"

"Lemme see!"

She threw the glass to the floor and snatched the paper.

Having read, she leaned back and stared at him, bewildered.

"Well," she said futilely in a small voice, "what do you know about that! Drowned himself!"

"No," Malling corrected, "he didn't drown himself. He was found

drowned. The newspaper intimates that there had been drinking and that he was drunk. What do you think of that?"

"It isn't so. I never saw him drunk; and he wouldn't get drunk with all that dope on his hands. No."

Malling's almond eyes became slits, thoughtful.

"I wonder whether your going back had anything to do with it? I wonder—"

Chee-Chee sat up, recovering her wits.

"That's why I didn't see him this morning! That's why they said he was gone! He was dead then!"

"I wonder," said Malling again. "Perhaps not. Perhaps he was drowned after we left. Perhaps it was made to appear that *we* drowned him."

Chee-Chee let out another screech—"Wha-at!"

"They might," said Malling placidly, "have planned to make it seem that way. You had trouble with him, you know. You returned to his house in the middle of the night. Bazin and Cervar may have contrived to involve you—and me."

"Bunk," said Chee-Chee, arguing now in opposition to her previous statement. "He wasn't around when we were there. His car was gone, you remember. They got him when he came back or else he fell in after they left."

"Why did they leave at that hour of the morning?"

"To take in the dope that had just come ashore. The paper don't say anything about dope so it can't have been there. They took it."

"Why didn't Walton go with them—assuming that his death occurred accidentally while he was alone?"

She had no answer for that.

"So," said Malling, "I think that if they killed him it was with the intention of implicating you—us—should there be any suspicion that it was not accident."

Chee-Chee wasn't listening. She was at the phone, calling Sanger in New York.

If, as Malling suggested, there was any danger of becoming meshed through Walton's death she wasn't going to sit and wait for it to strike her.

At first she failed to catch his interest, his supposition being that she wanted him to institute some action against Walton's estate. Without speaking too plainly—this on account of a possible listener on the wire—she finally made him understand what she was getting at, with particular reference to the two suitcases which had come in from the sea.

The contraband drugs which, doubling Bazin's estimate, she valued at fifty thousand dollars, changed the complexion of affairs for Sanger. Gathering from her guarded statements that the dope had been hi-jacked, he warmed to her plea and consented to act again as her counsel.

Without the slightest intention of doing anything to precipitate the issue with respect to Walton's death, he was drawn by apparent opportunity to share in the split-up through either Chee-Chee Lamar or Bazin and Cervar—or both.

As to what she should do, his immediate advice was simple and at the same time designed to make her view her position as perilous.

"Keep your head down while I get a line-up on the situation. If you've got things figured out right they will be looking for you soon. Keep under cover until you hear from me."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to Tom's River to find out how you stand and make arrangements for your appearance. A bond may be necessary. I'll be ready for that."

She showed more than a trace of anxiety. "A bond? How do you mean?"

"Material witness, perhaps. We'll hope that's all."

"They can't do that," she said angrily. "They can't—"

"Careful," he interrupted. "Don't say too much. You never know what any one can do until it's done. That may not be as bad as it looks, but—you understand?"

"Yes."

"All right. Do as I tell you then. Stay inside and don't talk until you hear from me. No matter what happens, keep your mouth closed. Can you do that?"

She said she could, and hung up.

But she couldn't. Chee-Chee began to get frightened.

Malling tried to reassure her; she told him to "Shut up!"

Sanger was largely responsible. Already fearful when she telephoned him she was more fearful when their conversation ended.

In saying that he would have a bail bond in readiness he over-emphasized her predicament. He made her arrest seem too much of a foregone conclusion.

That was the thought upon which her fear nourished and grew big; bigger with each dawdling minute.

Obedience to his instruction not to go out contributed to her state of mind. The hotel room took on the aspect of a prison cell. Being caged in this way was too prophetic.

There was a silver flask half full. She went to it.

"I wouldn't," said Malling.

"I would," she snapped.

She waited an hour. She was raging. Why didn't Sanger phone, as he had promised, and let her know how the land lay? She phoned his office. She was told that he was out; where and for how long being unknown.

She waited two hours more, treading back and forth, unable to be still, every nerve prickling, imagining the worst.

"To hell with Sanger!" she exclaimed. "I'm not going to sit here and let myself get framed and double crossed. Go get the car. We're on our way."

"Where?"

She stamped her foot.

"Where do you think? This act wasn't pulled in Denver, was it? Then we ain't going to Denver. Get the car."

CHAPTER X

Chee-Chee's Threat

EMIL SANGER had called on Cranby, Phil Walton's lawyer, immediately after he talked to Chee-Chee Lamar.

They had fenced around a bit, each knowing what was on the other's mind—the two suitcases full of narcotics. At last Sanger came out with it:

"My interest is the same as yours. I'm curious about what became of the two suitcases. You know the ones I refer to, don't you?"

"What if I do?"

Sanger scowled. "You might as well be frank," he said.

"I will. You think that Bazin and Cervar killed Walton and got away with the—suitcases. You also think that if it comes to a showdown with the commission of murder established, Chee-Chee Lamar might have more

difficulty in proving her innocence than they would in proving theirs. That's the situation as I see it. Am I right?"

"You are."

"And what do you want me to do?"

"I'm going to Jersey," said Sanger, "and figured you might be going too. As Walton's attorney you could get a close-up of the investigation which they wouldn't allow me. The suitcases may still be in the house, of course, unopened, but I doubt it. If they aren't, then Bazin and Cervar got them and it's up to us to see that they—shall we say?—do the right thing with them?"

"A reasonable proposition," said Cranby. "Miss Lamar, I infer, realizes that she may find herself in a tight corner."

"She does. How soon can you get away?"

"Now," said Cranby. "I suppose that's where Bazin and Cervar are—why I couldn't get hold of them in town. They should be on the job squaring themselves."

"And incidentally, perhaps," said Sanger, "trying to frame Chee-Chee. My car is over on Forty-Sixth Street. We'll ride."

They debated the situation this way and that as they rode.

"How much are you going to tell of what Lamar told you?" asked Cranby.

"Wait till I see what Bazin and Cervar have said. You'll be able to get that as Walton's attorney. I'll see how bad they make it appear for Chee-Chee before I say anything. If things look all right I'll tone her down and make her story conform. If they've tried to frame her we ought to hear of it without any delay."

Chee-Chee's name occurred early in the interview with Lieutenant Pearson of the State Police. He brought her in casually after having related the apparent explanation of the drowning and virtually dismissed it as an accident.

"You, I understand," he said to Sanger, "accompanied a Miss Lamar to Walton's bungalow last night."

Sanger nodded.

"You went, I'm told, to talk over a lawsuit which she proposed bringing against Walton. Is that so?"

Another nod.

"You were there, Mr. Cranby, as Walton's lawyer?"

Cranby nodded.

"Was there any trouble then, any quarrel?"

Sanger cleared his throat.

"Well," replied Cranby, "there were a few angry words, but nothing serious."

The lieutenant looked at Sanger. "Are you here to represent Miss Lamar?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't she come herself?"

"Shock," said Sanger. "Prostrated."

"Where is she now?"

Sanger evaded the question with another:

"Is her presence necessary? Now, I mean. Can't we get along without her until she recovers?"

"Well, I don't know," said the lieutenant. "I want to ask about her second visit to Walton. I want to know what they talked about when she was there at two o'clock this morning. It might turn the case into a suicide."

"Suicide?" queried Cranby, filling in while Sanger waited warily. "Oh, I see the idea. You think she may have said something that caused him to drown himself?"

"Something like that. If he was drunk he might have become despond-

ent over something she said. That's only an idea, of course."

"Worth considering," said Cranby.

"We want to get things right," said Pearson. "I'll have to get the dope from her. Bazin and Cervar didn't hear what she and Walton had to say."

"They didn't hear," said Sanger vaguely. "No, of course not."

Pearson was willing to be accommodating:

"We can get along without her if you can give us what we want. Didn't she tell you what they talked about?"

"In a way," said Sanger. "It was —well, an intimate sort of conversation. You can understand that. When you boil it down there actually wasn't much said."

"I understand. Bazin said she didn't stay long."

"Not long," said Sanger, weighing the significance of that statement and deciding how to proceed. "As a matter of fact she went begging, asking Walton to forgive her and take her back. That sums it all up."

"What did he say?"

"He'd think it over. He made a date with her for this afternoon at four o'clock. By the way, didn't you say Walton got drowned about four?"

"It figures out that way. He'd been dead from two to five hours when the doctor saw him at six thirty. So it must have been around four—soon after Bazin and Cervar left him."

"If they know when that was. They may have been too lit up to see the clock straight."

"Bazin says he kept sober on account of having to drive."

"And he says they left at four?"

"About three forty-five. Walton apparently wandered out immediately he was left alone. Went looking for them, perhaps."

"Perhaps."

Sanger looked at Cranby; said much with a fleeting wink.

"Then you're satisfied," said Cranby, "that his death was accidental?"

Lieutenant Pearson looked surprised.

"You don't suggest it was anything else, do you?"

"You mentioned suicide."

"They amount to the same thing from our angle. Either way closes the case for us. You're not hinting, are you, that there's something more to it? You haven't any reason for suspecting that he was murdered?"

"I haven't," said Cranby, "but as his attorney I naturally want to be sure that the case is actually as superficial as it seems and that nothing is being overlooked because of its apparent superficiality."

"We try not to overlook anything," said Pearson. "If you have any suggestions—"

Cranby shook his head.

The lieutenant said: "The report we have from the coroner says death was due to drowning and that the only evidence of injury is the bruise on the face. All we can do is go on that."

"If that's the coroner's report," said Sanger, "I can't see that there's anything more to be said. Now about Miss Lamar, lieutenant. She's badly prostrated. If you can get along without her—"

He broke off as a rap sounded on the door.

A trooper entered.

"Miss Lamar, sir," he announced, "on the Walton case. She says—"

"The damned idiot!" exploded Sanger, jumping up and starting from the room.

The lieutenant motioned and the trooper barred the way.

"Take your time, Mr. Sanger," said Pearson. "She's here to see me, not you. I'll see her."

Sanger spun angrily.

"Not till I've talked with her."

"Before that."

"I'll allow her to talk only in my presence—and after I've talked with her."

Pearson stood up, head and shoulders over Sanger.

"Why?"

"She's entitled to counsel."

"I can't see what for. She's not being accused of anything."

"That don't matter," said Sanger truculently. "She's in no condition to be questioned, and she won't be unless I'm present to safeguard her rights."

The lieutenant looked at Cranby perplexedly.

Cranby gave him no enlightening sign, remained aloof.

"There's no one attempting to violate her rights—"

"No one is going to," asserted Sanger. "I'm going to see to that."

The lieutenant's manner sharpened. The case began to look less simple. He had no objection to Sanger's presence while he talked with Miss Lamar. It should even be helpful, revealing, to note which parts of her statement Sanger desired to censor or suppress.

"Very well," he said. "Since you think she's in such need of protection you can stay. Bring her in."

Before she was well inside the lieutenant's office Chee-Chee opened fire on Sanger.

"Swell advice you gave me, wasn't it? You thought you had me neatly parked out of the way while you come here and got me all labeled for storage. Well, you wait a minute and see. I've got something to tell myself, and when I get through—"

Sanger's "Wait a moment—wait a moment," did nothing to check her. He shouted to drown her out and give her the cue.

"You're excited—hysterical. You shouldn't have come here. Everything is all right. You understand? Everything, I say, is all right. It's all right," he yelled. "Won't you understand what I'm saying? Everything is coming out all right!"

"I bet it is," she fired back, "for you—but that don't mean it's all right for me. Listen, Sanger, what d'you think I am? You can't double cross me—"

He stepped forward quickly, caught her arm and shook her.

"Easy," said the lieutenant. "Let her go."

"Yeh," said Chee-Chee, sneering, "lemme go. Phil Walton couldn't scare me, and I'll be damned if a little rat like you can. Maybe Phil Walton got drowned and maybe he didn't. I don't care. It's good for him anyhow. But I'm not sucker enough to sit still and let a bunch of crooks make me the goat. I'm gonna talk—

"Hey!" she squealed with pain as his fingers crushed her arm, "you're hurting me. Lemme go, you fool."

She wrenched to free herself, but he held her until the lieutenant's hand clamped on his shoulder and jerked him away.

Chee-Chee was still a moment, rubbing her arm.

"If you'll try to be calm, Miss Lamar," said Cranby suavely, "I'm sure you'll see how absurd it is to make a scene. I realize, of course, how great a shock Phil's death is to you, that you are excited and—"

"I'm not excited."

"—somewhat irresponsible at the moment," he continued. "You can

take my word for it, however, that everything is being done which should be done. Your interests are being protected to the fullest, and I may say that without breach of confidence that you will be agreeably surprised when settlement is made of his estate."

She looked at him suspiciously. He was stalling her, that was certain. She had no expectation of receiving anything under Walton's will.

Lieutenant Pearson stood back, observing, letting them talk. It was obvious that Cranby was, in effect, offering a bribe. The why of that could be developed later if she did not now bring it out. It was at least a clear lead to work on.

Sanger also held off, hopeful that Cranby's method of attack would continue to prove more successful in shutting her mouth.

"Who's talking about his estate?" asked Chee-Chee with an indication of willingness to hear more.

"I mention it," said Cranby, "because even in the midst of a great bereavement there is some consolation in knowing that the future is provided for. The lieutenant understands how things were between you and Phil. He knows that you came with Mr. Sanger last night to confer with Walton and myself over some legal action you considered taking. He knows—"

"Hold up a moment," interrupted Pearson. This was the most flagrant coaching. He frowned, smiled: "All right, go ahead."

"He understands," went on Cranby, "that there was some slight display of feeling, but that, on the whole, the conference was friendly. He also knows that you had a further talk of a friendly nature with Walton early this morning—"

Chee-Chee's teeth clicked on "Yes?"

"—which resulted in an engagement being made for this afternoon. Bazin and Cervar have assured him that although your visit was brief it was not curtailed on account of any unpleasantness. And Mr. Sanger has explained that you went bearing an olive branch which was not rejected.

"That, Miss Lamar, is the situation as the lieutenant has been informed. Only one point is lacking: He would like to know if anything was said which might have tended to make Walton despondent later on when he became under the influence of liquor? You are the only person who can answer that."

Chee-Chee smiled stiffly, half convinced that her fear of double dealing was unfounded and regretting that she had not waited to hear from Sanger before rushing in.

Her smile sweetened on Pearson.

"Phil and I just had a quiet little talk together. I was sorry and he was sorry—"

The door opened and a trooper beckoned.

"Pardon," said the lieutenant and went out.

Sanger stepped close to Chee-Chee.

"Now you're showing some sense. That's the line, but don't lay it on too thick. Why in hell didn't you stay away?"

She bridled again.

'Why in hell didn't you phone me? How did I know—"

"I couldn't fly here, could I? If you had any brains—"

"Hush," said Cranby. "Keep to that line, Miss Lamar, that Walton did seem inclined to despondency, but, as Sanger advised, don't lay it on too thick. Now hush, both of you; and stop looking like you'd like to cut each other's throats. Be still. Here he is."

Pearson came in smiling affably.

"If you don't mind, Miss Lamar," he said, "we'll postpone hearing your story for an hour or so. I have to go out now. You folks could have dinner and let me know when you're through."

Sanger seized the chance to improve her recital and make her letter-perfect.

"That reminds me," he said, "I skipped lunch. You, too, Cranby. Yes, let's eat."

"Don't hurry," said Pearson. "I'll be tied up for at least an hour. You could eat at the Prospect House and I'll call you there when I'm ready."

"We'll do that," said Sanger, leading Chee-Chee out.

Cranby lingered:

"I wonder, lieutenant, if I could have the key to Walton's bungalow? I'd like to look things over, you know, and check up on what's there."

"Why, yes," said Pearson, "sure. Any time."

"Thanks. I might run over now—"

"Sorry," said Pearson, "but I haven't got the key. I guess the coroner has it. I'll get it for you."

Cranby nodded: "If you will, thanks."

Being without a plausible excuse for insisting upon getting into the bungalow at this juncture, he followed Chee-Chee and Sanger to the street.

Lieutenant Pearson took up the telephone and called the county prosecutor.

"This Walton drowning," he said, "is all wet. I've got all the witnesses here in town and a couple of lawyers. Suppose you drop down and hear them."

"What seems to be wet besides the victim? That's not so good, but you invited it. Why the lawyers?"

"That's what got me at first. Then along came Walton's girl or his ex-girl, whose lawyer had been telling me was prostrated, and she was all set to raise hell over something. They shut her off, her lawyer and Walton's."

"Well?"

"And now," said Pearson, "one of the boys just picked up word that in the Horseshoe Inn around one o'clock this morning she was threatening to kill somebody she was going to call on. She went away from the inn then and admits she went to Walton's."

"You're sure she's the same woman?"

"Certain. The one in the inn was with a Chinese-looking bloke—yellow. He's still with her. I just saw him in her car."

"I'll be over," said the prosecutor.

CHAPTER XI

One Mouth Closed

CERVAR and Bazin, after their interview with Pearson, had gone to hunt something to drink. They had found it, and had spent some time at it. Finally, they were hungry and headed for the Prospect House.

The minute Bazin stepped in he caught sight of Chee-Chee and the others at a table in a far corner. He pushed Cervar back and himself retreated.

"What's the idea?" objected Cervar, stimulated by a number of drinks. "I thought we were going to eat."

"Not here," said Bazin. "Didn't you see Lamar and Sanger and Cranby and the Chinaman in a huddle in there? We don't want to mix in—not yet."

"I don't see why not. We ought to get together with her and have a talk. She's liable—"

"I'd like nothing better," said Bazin, "but not in any public place. You

know that dame's tongue. She's waving her arms in there now and talking to beat hell."

"That's all right, but suppose she's told the cops we're liars?"

"We'd've heard it by now. They'd be running around after us, and this town ain't so big you can hide for more'n a minute. And if she did, that'll be her hard luck. Our word goes double against hers. We say she saw Walton and we stand on that. If she wants to say she didn't how's she going to prove it?"

"The Chinaman—"

"He didn't come in the house."

"He'll say anything she tells him."

"Let him. Anyhow, all she can say can't put anybody in jail. And Sanger won't let her shoot off her mouth until he knows what we're telling. Cranby neither. They've got some bread they want buttered and we've got the butter."

"We could call one of them out of there, Sanger or Cranby, and get them all up to our room."

"We'll study over them a minute. Come on outside."

From the veranda they observed an unsociable dinner party through a window. Chee-Chee was going strong, quarrelling with Sanger.

"She don't look good to me," said Cervar. "She's trying to run things, and that don't look good at all."

Bazin sneered. Yet as he watched Chee-Chee Lamar talking and apparently dominating her companions, he had a twinge of doubt.

As Cervar had said, Charlie Malling would swear to anything she commanded. And wasn't it barely possible that she and Malling might fabricate the link necessary to join the circumstantial to the material? They might claim to have seen—

What?

They could not say that they had witnessed the forcible drowning of Walton. They couldn't explain their failure to do something to prevent it, nor their silence for all these hours afterward. But they might—

What?

Bazin could not answer his own question, but the things it conjured created in him the first flickering of worry. He thought of the reputation of the Chinese for guile, subtlety—and Charlie Malling was a Chinaman.

There was, of course, one sure way of tying Chee-Chee's tongue—with cash. But if she and Malling had cooked up something which would give her the whip hand, her demands would be great—too great. She was that type.

One way? There were two ways—and one of them would not only insure against her testifying, but also against the making of any demand whatsoever by her.

"Where's the Chinaman going?" asked Cervar as he saw Malling get up.

"For God's sake," said Bazin tartly, "stop asking fool questions. I'm no mind-reader."

His glance followed Malling across the room, narrowing on him calculatingly. If Chee-Chee Lamar had no corroborative witness, the effect would be the same as if she herself did not exist. Offering only her own unsupported statement she could talk all summer, talk her head off, talk herself to death, and what would it matter? And so, if Malling—

Malling came out of the hotel and went down the steps.

Bazin glanced along the veranda. He and Cervar were alone on it. He eased the gun on his hip.

"Come on," he said.

"Uh?" Cervar turned from frown-

ing contemplation of Chee-Chee and the two lawyers. "Where you going?"

"I'll write you a letter. Come on!"

As they went down the steps, Malling went round a corner of the hotel into a side street.

When they turned the corner he was getting into Chee-Chee's roadster.

Bazin looked quickly about.

Supper time in a small country town. From where he was not a person in sight. It was dusk, almost dark.

"What—" began Cervar.

Bazin heard the starter hum under Malling's foot, heard the motor take hold. He quickened his step; with Cervar, only half comprehending, several paces behind.

The car was just moving when Bazin hopped in and sank the muzzle of his automatic into the fleshy part of Malling's side.

Malling made no motion of surprise or startlement; glanced without turning his head and recognized Bazin. His foot held the clutch where it was, partly engaged. The car rolled slowly on.

Cervar came alongside, again asking "What—"

"Get our car," said Bazin, "and drive out this way. We'll be waiting for you. Make it snappy."

Malling steered from the curb. He asked no question, said nothing.

"You'll keep both hands on the wheel," said Bazin. "I'll shift gears and handle the gas. Stop slipping your clutch and let's go into speed."

His foot found the accelerator and he made the shift with Malling manipulating the clutch.

"Drive straight on," ordered Bazin, "and don't make any funny moves. I'll let you have it quick as a wink if you start anything. I don't care if the whole town is looking on."

Malling sat motionless, gazing straight ahead.

The reason for his abduction was not clear to him, but doubtless would be explained in good season. He had patience.

On a dirt road a mile out of town, a byway, he was told to stop.

"We'll wait here," said Bazin. "Sit as you are, facing front with your hands on the wheel. Now tell me, have you talked with the police?"

"No."

"Has Lamar?"

"Yes."

"Did she get a message from me before she left New York?"

"No."

"A message from Doc Mitchell or Sanger?"

"No. We have not been to New York. We went to Atlantic City."

Bazin growled. That didn't sound favorable.

"What did she tell the police?"

"Nothing so far—practically nothing. She is waiting now for them to hear her story."

"What do you mean, practically nothing?"

"She had only begun talking when the officer was called away."

"And what was she going to say?"

Malling looked out of the corners of his slant eyes at him.

"Mr. Sanger and Mr. Cranby talked with the police before we arrived. The police told them what you had said—that Miss Lamar saw Mr. Walton for a few minutes about two o'clock this morning. Mr. Cranby and Mr. Sanger told her of that and she was going to agree with what you had said."

"You're sure of that?" asked Bazin sharply.

"Quite sure. It is what we talked over at dinner."

Bazin drew a long breath, grinned.

"And what does she want for doing that?"

Malling ceased being truthful:

"I do not know."

"What does she think she's going to get?"

"I do not know."

"You're a liar," said Bazin and let it go at that.

The shadow of misgiving vanished. Once Chee-Chee committed herself to confirmation of his statement that she had seen Walton on her second visit she could not recant to accuse him and Cervar without embroiling himself.

"You're sure," he asked Malling, "that you have not talked with the police?"

"Quite sure. I am to go with Miss Lamar after dinner. She will be waiting—"

"Start up," said Bazin, seeing the lights of a car coming up behind them.

Malling started the motor.

"Are we going back?"

Bazin had one eye on him and the other on the approaching car until he identified it as his own.

"We're going ahead," he said. "Put her in speed now."

They went on, with Cervar trailing.

Malling smiled faintly, fatalistically. He hastened his own end by snatching at the gun.

As Malling's hand flicked downward Bazin fired. Three bullets ranged upward into Malling's chest, and one of them found his heart.

They left him in the pine woods and abandoned Chee-Chee's car at the railroad station in Lakehurst, twenty miles away.

Bazin consulted a timetable posted in the waiting room and rejoined Cervar.

"Made to order," he said. "There's a train for New York in ten minutes. Lamar can go to hell now. If she opens her yap we'll say that she and her Chink knocked off Walton and the Chinaman got cold feet and took a powder!"

Cervar muttered and took another swig from his flask.

He gloomed on the way back to Tom's River and mouthed the flask frequently until Bazin took it from him. He wasn't keen for so much killing!

CHAPTER XII

"You Don't Have to Answer—"

CHEE-CHEE LAMAR was in a freshly fretful mood, occasioned by the prolonged absence of Malling when, at seven o'clock, Lieutenant Pearson telephoned requesting her presence. Malling had been gone half an hour.

A hasty search producing no trace of him or the car, Cranby looked at her quizzically as he asked:

"You couldn't think of any good reason for his disappearance, Miss Lamar?"

The implication was too clear to be missed.

She stared at him angrily.

"You're a fool."

"Perhaps. But my guess is that Malling is not. He said he was going after gas, didn't he? I can see three garages from where I stand. We'd better go without him and not keep the constabulary waiting. If he shows up—which I doubt—he knows where to come."

Sanger was of the same opinion, but did not say so. Murder by drowning appealed to him as worthy of an Oriental mind.

A round little man, benevolent of

face, was with Pearson when they arrived. He was introduced as Mr. Townsend—to which Pearson added, apparently as an afterthought, "the county prosecutor."

Chee-Chee was directed to a chair facing the lieutenant's desk, at which the prosecutor seated himself. Pearson stood beside him.

Sanger and Cranby were given chairs on either side, but apart from her. A stenographer sat against the wall behind her.

Townsend opened by addressing the lawyers in a tone as mild as his appearance, but which somehow suggested a hidden edge:

"You gentlemen will greatly oblige by interrupting as little as possible. All we are going to do is ask Miss Lamar for an account of her movements. There will be no intricate questions—nothing that she cannot answer automatically. She knows where she went and what she did. We want her to tell us. That's quite simple, isn't it?"

Cranby nodded. He lounged with an arm hanging over the back of his chair, one leg draped over the other, casual, seemingly disinterested.

Sanger nodded, too, but sat forward, alertly concerned. Like Cranby, he foresaw trouble.

Chee-Chee shook back her sables, smoothed her dress over her crossed knees, a trifle bewildered, sensing something ominous without fully appreciating it.

"I'm going to begin, Miss Lamar," said Townsend in the kindliest way, "by advising you that you do not have to answer any question if you do not choose. That is your right. You understand, don't you?"

She nodded, not by any means sure that she did.

"Just a minute," said Sanger. "Am I to understand that you are accusing Miss Lamar of something?"

Townsend looked at him reproachfully.

"All right," said Sanger, "I'll keep still. Go ahead."

The prosecutor dangled his pince-nez on his chubby front.

"Miss Lamar, you went to see Walton at his bungalow yesterday afternoon. What was the purpose of your visit?"

The warning with regard to her rights and Sanger's question as to whether she was being accused of crime had given Chee-Chee a clearer picture. She was at once angry, bewildered, frightened, but anger was uppermost.

"Walton tried to make a bum out of me, see? I went to tell him it was going to cost him money if he didn't treat me right."

"Not blackmail, surely?"

"I've got letters and could sue him, but all I wanted was for him to treat me right."

"How do you mean?"

"The way he quit me he was making me look like a bum on Broadway. I wanted him to be regular, that's all."

"You quarreled with him?"

"I was mad."

"So. And how did your negotiations turn out? Did he agree to do what you wanted?"

"No."

"He refused absolutely?"

"I guess so."

"And you went away angry?"

"I was mad, yes."

"All this was in the presence of Mr. Sanger and Mr. Cranby?"

"Yes."

"That was about six o'clock?"

"I guess so. I don't know. About then, probably."

"And where did you go?"

"I drove Sanger to the train."

"Where?"

"Point Pleasant."

Sanger said: "I got the six twenty-two if that will help you fix the time."

"Thanks," said Townsend, "it's unimportant. From Point Pleasant, Miss Lamar, where did you go?"

"Lakewood?"

"With whom?"

"A friend—Charlie Malling."

"Where did you meet him?"

"He drove me and Sanger down from New York."

"And what did you do in Lakewood?"

"Had dinner and danced."

"Did you have anything to drink?"

"Some."

"How long did you stay there?"

"I don't know. About ten o'clock, I guess."

"And where did you go?"

"We started for Atlantic City, but stopped in Tom's River."

"Why?"

"To get something to eat—to dance."

"Where did you go to eat and dance?"

"Some road house. I don't know the name."

"The Lighthouse Inn?"

"That might be it."

"Did you have anything more to drink?"

"Some."

"Were you drunk?"

"No."

"Was Malling drunk?"

"No."

"Then you have a clear recollection of everything that occurred?"

She frowned, looked at Sanger.

He could only frown in return, having no inkling of what to expect.

"I think so," she answered.

Townsend put on his glasses, spoke gravely:

"Before I ask anything more, Miss Lamar, I'm going to tell you again that you need not answer. You know that?"

She pulled her sables up on her shoulders, suddenly cold.

She nodded.

"That being so," said the prosecutor, "you remember making a threat to kill Walton?"

She gasped "No!"

"In the Lighthouse Inn, I mean. Your escort tried to detain you when you wanted to go. You said you'd go yourself and that if the person you were going to see became rough you would kill him. 'I'll kill the crook,' were the words you used."

"Oh!" Her mouth hung open.

Sanger was on his feet, protesting.

"Now wait a minute! You don't have to answer that—"

"I've told her so twice," said Townsend. "You must have heard me. She may want to answer it, though. Do you, Miss Lamar?"

She nodded, gulped, came up fighting.

"Sit down, Sanger," she said, "I can talk for myself."

"If you talk yourself in," he said, "I hope you can talk yourself out again. If you must be a fool—" He threw up his hands and subsided.

"I didn't mean that," she said to Townsend. "I was mad, see? I was only talking the same as anybody talks when they're mad."

"Yes. You were very angry, weren't you?"

"I was mad, yes."

"You smashed a glass on the floor?"

"I might have. I smash things when I get mad. It don't mean anything."

"Perhaps not. Your escort was still Malling?"

"Yes."

"You left the inn about one thirty. Where did you go?"

"To Walton's."

"Arriving there when?"

"I don't know. How long does it take to get there?"

"You went directly there?"

"Yes."

"It's about half an hour's easy ride. That would get you to Walton's about two o'clock or shortly after. Is that your recollection?"

"I don't know. I suppose so."

"Did you see Walton?"

She looked at Sanger and at Cranby, took on a hard smile.

"No."

Sanger jumped up again. "But—"

"No," she repeated emphatically. "I did not."

The prosecutor turned inquiringly to Pearson, who shrugged.

He glanced at Sanger. "You were going to say something?"

"No," said Sanger, looking at Chee-Chee, "it doesn't matter. I was going to remind Miss Lamar of your warning and advise her to be careful, but I suppose she understands what she's doing."

Chee-Chee's voice hardened to match her fixed smile. "I'll say I do!"

"Then you want the statement to stand that you did not see Walton this morning?"

"I do. What time was he drowned?"

"About four o'clock, so far as we know."

"How do you know?"

"We have witnesses who saw him alive at three forty-five."

"Who?"

"The men who were there when you called—Bazin and Cervar."

"Anybody else?"

Townsend considered her shrewdly.

"Nobody else. Why?"

"Do you believe them?"

"We have to until we're given some reason for disbelieving them."

"They're a pair of crooks like Walton was," said Chee-Chee, "and I can show you that they're liars. They told me at two o'clock that Walton had gone to New York. They told you they left him at the bungalow at a quarter of four. They told you I talked with him. I didn't see him. They told you I was only at the bungalow a few minutes. I was there until half after three."

The prosecutor turned again to Pearson.

"There seems to be a question of veracity. These men are stopping in town, aren't they? I'd like to see them as soon as I get through with this young woman."

"They registered at the Prospect House," said Pearson, "I'll send for them."

He rang for a trooper and issued the order.

"Do you claim, Miss Lamar," asked Townsend, "that Walton was not at the bungalow during your visit?"

"I don't claim nothing of the kind. I say they told me he wasn't there."

"And you believed that?"

"Not right away, I didn't, because I know these crooks. I looked the place over for him. I believed them finally when they showed me his car was gone and said he'd left word for me to see him in New York this afternoon."

Pearson asked: "What had Walton's car to do with anything?"

"Well," said Chee-Chee, "it was gone and so I finally took their word for it that he was."

"When had you seen it there?"

"Yesterday; when I left in the evening. It was there when Bazin and Cervar arrived. Sanger and Cranby know that."

Her eyes challenged them.

Sanger returned an affirmative nod while he considered how to align himself in the situation which she was forcing.

Cranby prepared to divorce himself from the whole proposition.

"Walton's car was there," he said. "He drove me to the train in it."

"Well," demanded Chee-Chee, "who took it away if he was there this morning? Would he be likely to let somebody take his car and leave himself to walk if he wanted to go away from there? It's four or five miles, ain't it, to the station?"

"He might have loaned it," said Sanger.

"Has anybody brought it back?"

"Not yet," said Pearson. "This matter of his car, in fact, has never been raised until now. It didn't occur to us that he was miles from anywhere without any means of transportation."

"Assuming," said Townsend, "that you left Walton's at half after three, where did you go then?"

"Atlantic City."

"What time did you get there?"

"About five thirty."

"And what then?"

"We went to a hotel—the Fredonia."

"And so," said Townsend, "I presume, to bed?"

"And so to bed," said Chee-Chee.

"What time did you hear of Walton's death?"

"Noontime. The waiter brought up a paper with breakfast."

"Were you surprised?"

"I certainly was."

"What did you do?"

"I phoned Sanger."

Sanger broke in: "You're being very foolish, Chee-Chee. I'm telling you—"

"Wait till I ask you," she snapped. "I took your advice once to-day and that's enough."

"I'm advising you," he said warningly, "to take it again."

"No more, please, Mr. Sanger," said Townsend. "She knows what she's doing. Tell me, Miss Lamar, didn't it occur to you to come here and inform the authorities of your visit to Walton?"

Chee-Chee nodded. "I thought of that, too. But the way things looked I thought I better call Sanger and see what he said."

"The way things looked," repeated Townsend, "exactly how do you mean that?"

"I mean that it looked to me like I might get in a jam."

"How so? What made you think that?"

"The way things looked—that's all."

The prosecutor smiled. "It's rather vague, but we'll let it rest for the present. You phoned Mr. Sanger. Have you any objection to telling us what you said to him?"

"I object," said Sanger.

"Why?"

"A confidential communication—"

"From your side, but not from hers. What do you say, Miss Lamar?"

Chee-Chee shot another malicious glance at Sanger and laughed shortly.

"I'll tell you—sure. I asked him where I got off—if it looked to him like there was anything funny about it and if I was likely to get in a jam. I told him I'd gone back to the bungalow and that Phil wasn't there."

"That's a lie," said Sanger.

"Yeah?" She faced him, sneering. "Don't you tell me I'm a liar, Sanger. Don't start anything you can't finish. I told you Bazin and Cervar told me Walton had gone to New York—"

"You told me," said Sanger harshly, "that you talked with Walton and that you had an appointment to talk terms with him this afternoon."

"Liar!" Chee-Chee laughed again unmusically. "If that's what I told you why did you tell me to stay under cover in Atlantic City until I heard from you? Why did you say you'd come down here and have a bail bond ready for me and hope I wouldn't be held as anything worse than a witness?"

CHAPTER XIII

Captain Darrott of Trenton

"ROT!" Sanger gestured as if brushing away what she had said. "I won't argue with you. I'll recount our conversation should that seem necessary when the proper time comes."

"No," said Townsend, "we won't gain anything by arguing this point either just now. Doubtless—"

"No," said Chee-Chee, mocking, "don't argue, Sanger. Take my advice this time and don't argue. Or would you like to tell me, too, that I couldn't get you interested at all until I told you there was fifty thousand dollars' worth of stuff running loose that you could cut in on? Come on, call me a liar again!"

Sanger attempted to look blank, but his face twitched with fury.

Pearson leaned forward, framing a question. Townsend shook his head, saying mutely: "Let them fight!"

"I can't call you a liar," said Sanger with evident repression, "when I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about."

"You haven't!" jeered Chee-Chee. "Then why are you quitting me now and lining up with Bazin and Cervar? Why are you calling me a liar and trying to protect them? You don't know what I'm talking about—oh, no!—but you do know damn well that they got away with two bags full of dope worth more than fifty grand!"

Sanger looked at the others with the same incomplete effort at blank incomprehension.

"She's crazy," he said.

Chee-Chee's temper broke the bonds under which she had been holding it. She spat at him.

"I'm crazy, am I?" she shrilled. "Well, watch how crazy I can be when I try! Listen, mister," she said to Townsend. "Phil Walton was in the dope business, see? He came down here to receive the stuff when it was brought ashore. Bazin and Cervar were in with him. They came down to help land the stuff and see nothing happened on the road back to the city. You can see that, can't you?"

"Yes," said Townsend softly, "yes."

Lieutenant Pearson half closed his eyes, slowly nodding, seeing much.

Cranby pursed his lips thoughtfully, a wintry frown encompassing his face; restively shifted his position.

Sanger expelled little hissing breaths between his teeth, his fingers gently snapping, momentarily undecided whether to go on or to draw back.

"Two bags came in," went on Chee-Chee, enjoying their discomfiture, "two suitcases. I saw them and Bazin told me they were worth twenty-five grand—which anybody that knows

him would double at least once. You didn't find these bags, did you," she asked Pearson, "in the house? Pigskin bags with three locks on them. They were in the living room when I was there this morning."

"We didn't see them," said Pearson. "They weren't in the house."

"You bet they weren't," said Chee-Chee. "Bazin and Cervar got away with them—and Cranby and Sanger are chasing them."

"Really," said Cranby in a pained voice, "that's going a little too far. I left Walton's place at six o'clock, you know, and have absolutely no knowledge—"

"Too damn far, I call it!" rasped Sanger. "So damn far that it's farther than I'm going to stand for. Now wait till I tell one!"

He grinned viciously at Chee-Chee before turning to the prosecutor.

"You heard her say I'm trying to protect Bazin and Cervar. I scarcely know these men and never had any dealings with them in my life. The fact of the matter is that I've been trying to protect her. She threatened Walton in my hearing and in Cranby's last night. Isn't that so, Cranby?"

Chee-Chee shook up her sables with a contemptuous shrug.

"What a liar! Why—"

"Let me handle this, please," said Townsend, quietly assertive.

"Go right ahead," she said, "but don't blame me if I leap on that lizard in a minute and take a crack at him."

"Cranby heard her," said Sanger, "and I imagine Bazin and Cervar did, too. I mean what she said as she and I went out the door. She stopped at the door, didn't she, and shouted, 'I'll get you; one way or another, I'll get you.'"

Chee-Chee laughed. "I'd give a leg if I could get you, Sanger, you dirty little crook. I said it—sure I did—but you know, and this rat knows what I meant."

"And what," asked Townsend, "did you mean?"

"What I said. But before that I'd told him I'd tip him off to the district attorney if he didn't set me up right after making me look like a bum on Broadway. That's how I said I'd get him—one way or the other."

"Was that your interpretation of her remark?" Townsend asked Cranby.

"I didn't bother interpreting it," replied Cranby.

"But you heard her," insisted Sanger.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And you know she was mad enough right then to kill him."

"We won't go into that," said Townsend quickly. "We'll have to look more closely into this case, it seems. Thank you, Mr. Sanger, for giving us so much help in opening it up."

"Say!" Chee-Chee confronted him with widened eyes. "Do you mean that you believe this crook? Do you mean that you think I knocked Walton off?"

Townsend regarded her benignly.

"I'm always ready to believe anything if there's evidence to bear it up. For instance, you have made statements which are being disputed. Can you substantiate that you did not see Walton this morning, that you remained at or near his bungalow until three thirty, and that your conversation with Mr. Sanger over the phone was as you claim? If you haven't at least one witness to corroborate you in these things, I'm afraid—"

"Why, yes," she said, "of course, I have. Charlie Malling was at the

bungalow with me and he heard me talk over the phone with Sanger."

"Where is Malling now?"

Chee-Chee's face clouded. Malling had been crowded from her mind during the last half hour. Where—

"He's around," she said hesitantly.

"Where?"

"Around. He had dinner with us and went to get gas."

"You haven't seen him since?"

"No. Not unless he's waiting outside."

"He isn't," said Pearson. "I'd have been notified."

"Then," said Chee-Chee, "he must be waiting at the hotel—"

She was interrupted by the entrance of Bazin and Cervar, fresh from the killing of Malling. And on the heels of Bazin and Cervar, sauntered another arrival.

Lieutenant Pearson saluted him with respect; presented him somewhat impressively to the county prosecutor.

"Captain Darrott from Trenton. This is Prosecutor Townsend, captain. You know of the captain, of course, Mr. Townsend."

"We're old friends, lieutenant," said Darrott.

"Yes, indeed," said Townsend.

A quizzical light came to his eye. Darrott was chief of the detective division of the State Police. There was a question also in Pearson's eye. His preliminary report to headquarters had given the Walton case as what it appeared to be—accidental drowning. He had asked no assistance nor communicated any suggestion of foul play, for it was only within the last hour that any evidence of such had developed. He couldn't see what had brought Darrott.

"We're questioning in the Walton drowning," said Pearson. "These people are all involved—the last persons to be with Walton. Their stories don't all agree."

Darrott's glance roamed over the group. Cranby rather studiously unconcerned; Sanger scowling blackly at Chee-Chee Lamar, but with an ear cocked to what was going on; Chee-Chee herself sitting erect between these two, frightened, but boldly facing things out; Bazin quick-eyed, frowning as he strove to size up the situation; Cervar mildly intoxicated, glowering, restless.

"I dropped in," said Darrott, "to talk about that. How do their stories differ and how far apart are they?"

"Step outside and tell him," said Townsend. "I'll play herder over the sheep and the goats and see they don't become too chummy. I'll hold everything till you're ready."

Pearson sketched the recent developments in good order for the detective chief.

"But," said Darrott, "the coroner says positively that Walton was drowned. I talked with him on the wire from Trenton."

"So he told us. That Walton was drowned, I mean. He didn't say you had called him."

"I told him not to. I wasn't working over your head, lieutenant, but I thought it advisable to keep the investigation under cover. I had information not available to you."

"Yes, sir," said Pearson. He did not feel that this intrusion was any reflection upon himself; Darrott generally found information not available to others.

"The woman," said Darrott, "couldn't have drowned him."

"There was Malling," said Pearson. "And Walton might have been drugged before he was thrown into the

water. I don't mean to suggest that they held him under water until he was dead. It's more probable, isn't it, and not unfeasible, that he was first made unconscious?"

"It's feasible," granted Darrott. "Speaking of drugs—you assume that she and Malling got away with the drugs she says came ashore?"

Pearson scratched his head.

"Frankly, I don't know what to think on that point. If anything, I'd figure that Bazin and Cervar took the drugs—if there actually was any."

"There was," said Darrott, "I know that. Let's go in and hear Bazin and Cervar while I wait for a message from the coroner."

At the door to the lieutenant's office he paused.

"I'm waiting," he confided, "to learn whether Walton was, as you figure, drugged. The whole case—if there is one—may easily rest on that. It would be difficult, wouldn't it, to prove without eyewitnesses, that any one deliberately drowned somebody else?"

"Yes," said Pearson, "I guess it would."

"It's probably the safest way of committing murder," said Darrott, "so long as there's nobody looking on. I've known of instances—and this may be another unless we succeed in building a circumstantial case as strong as a battleship. Let's try."

CHAPTER XIV

Breaks of the Game

"WE'VE had a splendid meeting," reported Townsend cheerfully, "with not one word of consequence spoken all the time you've been gone. Miss Lamar did start a couple of times on a few personalities, but agreed to be good. Mr. Sanger seems anxious to converse with Mr. Bazin and Mr. Cervar; and they to talk with him. He did make some attempt to do so, and so did they, but subsided when I pointed out that we have a stenographer in attendance. Mr. Cranby apparently wants to remain alone. That covers the ground since you went out, lieutenant. Do we go on as we were or has Captain Darrott caused some change in our procedure?"

"No change," said Darrott. "What are you going to do next?"

"We'll excuse Mr. Sanger and Mr. Cranby while we endeavor to reconcile the statements of these other men and Miss Lamar."

"I protest," said Sanger vehemently, "and I want the stenographer to get that. As counsel—"

"For whom?" asked Townsend.

"For Mr. Bazin and Mr. Cervar. As counsel—"

"Which makes you the representative of every one concerned with the possible exception of Mr. Cranby. Perhaps he, too—"

"I'm in no need of counsel," said Cranby, "but I do think that as attorney for the Walton estate I should be allowed to remain."

"I can't see the necessity," said Townsend. "The estate cannot be affected in any manner by anything that takes place here to-night."

"If you won't resent my advice, Mr. Cranby," said Darrott, "let me say that you may find reason to congratulate yourself later on if you withdraw now without protesting too strenuously. Need I say more?"

Cranby looked at him squarely, then bowed to Townsend.

"With your assurance that the estate will not be affected—" He moved to the door.

"You, too, Sanger," said Darrott brusquely. "The ice is thin—thin."

Sanger caught Bazin's eye, jerked his head toward Chee-Chee and shook it. It was all he could do.

He stared at Darrott angrily, but impotently—and acted wisely.

"I'll go." He grinned crookedly. "It's the first time I ever ran up against this Jersey justice we hear so much about. It's rough, isn't it?"

"Sometimes," said Darrott. "Don't go away, you know. We'll want you and Cranby again."

"Here's hoping," said Chee-Chee, and laughed.

Townsend directed Bazin and Cervar to the chairs vacated by Cranby and Sanger on each side of Chee-Chee.

He invited the captain to take the chair behind Pearson's desk.

"Your show," said Darrott, declining. "Put it on."

The prosecutor beamed on Bazin and Cervar.

"There are one or two points, gentlemen," he said in his disarmingly gentle way, "which you can help us clear up. But first let me explain that you may refuse to answer if you wish; although you can see how by refusing you might place yourselves in a doubtful light since you have already gone on record. One point at issue is your statement that Miss Lamar saw and talked with Walton at or about two o'clock this morning. She denies that. Do you again say she did?"

Chee-Chee watched him with lips and teeth parted—ready to bite.

"She did," said Bazin. "We'll both swear to that."

"Liar!" said Chee-Chee. "You—"

She stopped in amazement as Darrott winked at her.

"Hold it!" he grinned. "Let's get this thing cleaned up and then you can tell them all you please. Give Townsend a chance to finish and you'll find you're doing yourself a whole lot of good. Right?"

"You win," she said. "There's a trick to it some place, I suppose, but—well, all right."

"There's a trick," said Darrott.

The telephone rang.

Pearson answered and passed it over to Darrott, who grunted several times and hung up.

"Don't you think, counselor," he said, "that it would save time if you get these men to say flatly whether they do or do not want to change their earlier statements?"

The prosecutor took the hint to speed up.

Bazin and Cervar stood pat, mindful that they had said nothing under oath and could always recant.

"Did you," asked Darrott, "hear Miss Lamar threaten Walton last night? When she was leaving the bungalow and you were arriving."

"Did she threaten him?" echoed Bazin slowly.

"Did she say she'd get him?"

"Get him," said Bazin, "one way or the other. That's what she said. You remember, Lou?"

Cervar shuffled his feet, moved his chair noisily, scowled at the floor. This cop had said there was a trick. Yeah, what kind of a trick? This might be it.

"Did you hear her say that?" asked Darrott.

Bazin prompted again: "You remember, Lou. We talked about that."

"Yeh," said Cervar thickly, "sure she said it. I heard her."

"That makes it unanimous," said Darrott. "She doesn't deny it."

Bazin and Cervar looked at him uncertainly. If this was his trick, what in hell was it? They fumbled mentally.

"The car," said Darrott.

"There's another thing," said Townsend. "What became of Walton's automobile?"

"His automobile?" said Bazin, cursing himself for something he had assuredly overlooked. He couldn't bring Doc Mitchell into this; Doc wouldn't stand for that. "How do you mean?"

"Who took it away?"

"Nobody that I know of. It was there when we left his place. Why? Do you mean it's gone?"

"You haven't any idea who took it or when?"

"Not a murmur. Why, Phil wouldn't let anybody take it and leave him without any way of getting away from there."

"L—" Chee-Chee bit off the word and laughed.

"He had no other visitors last night?" asked Darrott. "Nobody but yourselves after Miss Lamar and Cranby and Sanger went away?"

"That's all."

"Is that what you say, Cervar?"

"He said it. Yeh."

"That's all," said Darrott. "Call the others in, lieutenant. I'm going to tell a story."

CHAPTER XV

Cervar Breaks

"IT'S a story," said Darrott when he had the four men seated in a row at one side of the room and Chee-Chee in the desk chair, "which illustrates the breaks of the game and offers a pretty good example of everyday crime detection. I'm going to show you the case we have to prove that Walton was murdered—as some of you know and the others suspect.

"In headquarters at Trenton we got a report of the drowning this morning. A routine report because it appeared to be a routine affair without suspicious circumstances. The coroner certified that death was due to drowning and that seemed to close the matter except for the further routine of getting statements from those who had been last to see Walton alive.

"A simple case of drowning, you see, with accident or suicide as the alternatives and all the evidence pointing to accident. Good evidence, too, convincing enough. His slipper caught between two planks, indicating that he had tripped while leaving the jetty—a broken guard rail to show where, having tripped, he had plunged through and into the water. The Walton case seemed to be closed the moment it opened. At headquarters we laid it aside in just that way."

Cervar cleared his throat, twisted his feet about the legs of his chair.

Bazin growled out of the corner of his mouth at him to be still.

Chee-Chee Lamar lolled back in the swivel chair, took a cigarette case from her purse and lighted one.

"Among the morning's reports," said Darrott, "was another received from the coast guard regarding the chasing of a rum-runner off this immediate shore in the fog last night. The rum-runner was fired on, but got away and the coast guard asked us to look out for a wounded man or men in hospitals and elsewhere. Another routine item, you see, and so handled.

"Later in the forenoon we got another report from the coast guard telling of a fifteen-foot dory picked up a mile offshore and about five miles south of Point Pleasant—near where the chase had taken place. This dory had been struck by machine gun fire—and recently, for the splinters were

fresh—and it was bloodstained. We were asked to inquire more closely for any one requiring attention for bullet wounds—or dead.

"All routine, of course, but that wasn't all.

"This dory was without power: no engine. The coast guard had not been in contact with any such boat. So it became evident that the dory had blundered into the line of fire during the chase last night.

"And there was more than that about the dory. One of the three oars in it was broken—not shot through, but broken under strain. The handle was there, the blade missing.

"You see how things begin to fit together, don't you? A dory accidentally shot up in the fog and one oar missing and one broken. The fourth oar was found floating near the dory, having drifted with it. The blade of the broken oar was found by a patrolman sticking in the beach near Walton's bungalow.

"The dory had made a landing there. One oar got broken and another got lost overboard, probably when it was pitched by the surf. Then it was cast adrift after removal of its cargo and the wounded or dead man.

"We tied these ends together in Trenton, Bazin. They hold together, don't they?"

The direct question made Bazin jump. "It's a good bedtime story."

"What do you think, Cervar?"

Cervar's thoughts were beyond expression, chaotic.

"You, Sanger?"

"So help me God—"

"Ask him to," said Darrott. "Cranby?"

Cranby nodded calmly: "An interesting sequence, captain. What next came to light?"

"A dead man—another dead man. His body was found on the roadside near Perth Amboy with half a dozen machine gun bullets in it. Sixty miles from Walton's bungalow and where the bloodstained dory landed. A bootlegger's battle apparently. But then we got a quick identification from New York. The dead man was Joe Purcell, gunman and sometimes bodyguard for Phil Walton, the gambler.

"The New York police went after it quickly for us. They found that Purcell hadn't been seen in town for something like two weeks. Neither had another of Walton's men, Doc Mitchell. They picked up that Purcell and Mitchell had gone together to Havana. And the roadside near Perth Amboy was not on the usual road back from Havana. They found also that Doc Mitchell had suddenly reappeared in town. He had been in the country, he said, and didn't know anything about Purcell.

"And then, Bazin, the New York police found that Mitchell arrived in town early this morning by automobile. In a coupé registered in the name of Phil Walton and known to be his. You don't know anything about that, do you?"

Cervar cried hoarsely: "No!"

It came with Bazin's "Yes."

"Yes," said Bazin quickly, hoping to smother that misplaced denial, "we knew Doc Mitchell took the car. We didn't tell you because we didn't want to get mixed up in any rum running. Doc and Purcell, see, brought some liquor ashore and Purcell got his on the way in. Walton made Doc take him along because he didn't want to get hooked up with any rum running. He figured you'd figure—"

"Rum nothing," said Chee-Chee. "It was dope, Bazin, and you and Cervar killed Walton to hi-jack it."

"Dope," snarled Bazin. "You're a liar. You—"

"Dope," said Darrott. "We know that, Bazin. We know that Mitchell and Purcell came from Havana on the steamer Robin—and Mitchell didn't have to tell us.

"We got another break there—tied up another of the things you never even considered. The rum-chaser crew remembered that at the time the dory must have been shot up a ship was bellowing close by. We took a chance that the dory had come from that ship, because there wasn't any other ship around at the time.

"Checking arrivals in New York we identified that ship as the Robin and got people aboard her to admit having launched the dory with Mitchell and Purcell and two heavy suitcases.

"You see how that all joins up, don't you? And nobody would send two men to Havana to come back with two suitcases of liquor. It wouldn't be sense, would it?"

Bazin made no comment.

A trooper entered and whispered with Pearson. The lieutenant started out, but lingered to hear Darrott.

"You drowned Walton, you and Cervar. I had the coroner make another examination of the body. The ankles are bruised where some one held them. Some one else could have held him by the hair—"

"Whee!" burst out Chee-Chee, her eyes popping. "I know! They had him drowned when I was there! Their arms were all wet! And they drowned him in the bathtub! The floor was sopping, and Walton's shoes were there!

"In the tub," said Darrott, "yes. I told the coroner to search for traces of some stupifying drug in Walton's body, Bazin. He found none—but he did find that Walton was drowned in fresh water, and Barnegat Bay is as salty as the ocean."

"Fresh water!" gagged Cervar. He stared dully at Bazin; whimpered: "Now look what you've done for us! If you'd only listened—"

"Shut up!" hissed Bazin.

Pearson hurried in, literally dragging Rogers the clam digger by the arm.

"Here's one we all missed, captain. Go on, Rogers, it's your stuff. Tell it!"

"Well, now," began Rogers, "it was like this. I got to thinkin'—"

"Hell," said Pearson, "that's too slow. The girl is right. Walton was dead when she was there. He couldn't have drowned at four o'clock—not where he lay. There wasn't any water there at four o'clock. Nor at three o'clock. You get it? The tide was going out."

Prosecutor Townsend came out of the background.

"A very complete case," he beamed. "I'll take pleasure in sending them to the chair."

Her own stress over, Chee-Chee Lamar screamed with sudden remembrance that Charlie Malling was missing; and a newborn dread.

She leaped to her feet, clutching her sables in a bundle on her breast.

"Charlie!" she shrieked at Bazin. "What have you done with him? Where is he? I'll kill you—"

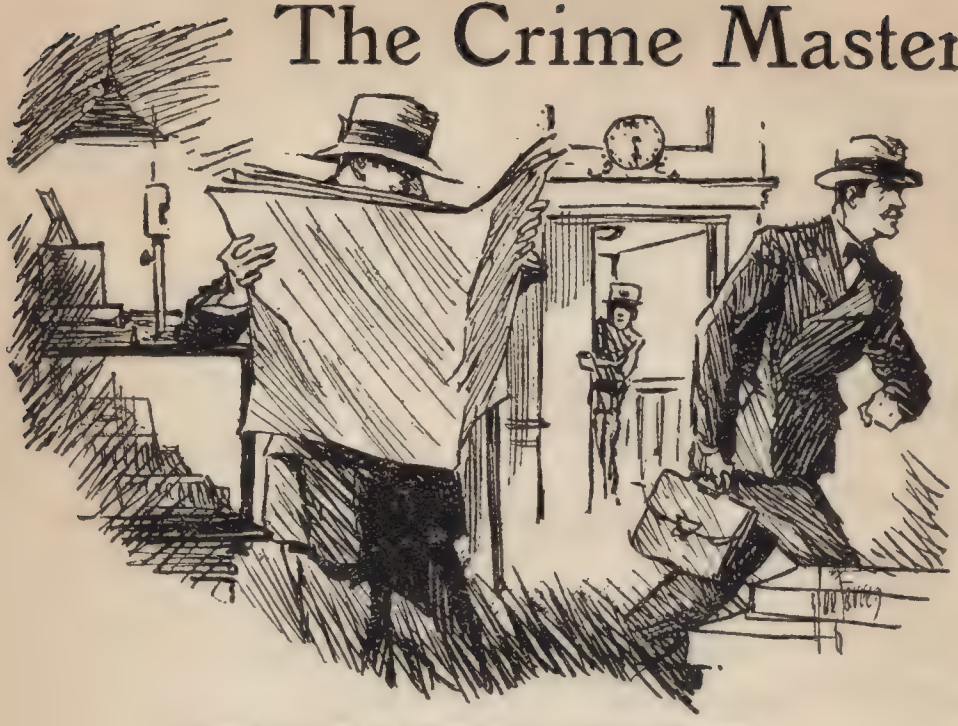
"Your damn Chinaman ran out on you," he sneered. "I saw him go. He ran out on you because you made him knock off Walton and—"

"I'll tell," chattered Cervar, "I'll tell. Bazin—"

They grabbed Bazin as he was lunging at Cervar, and took him away.

THE END

The Crime Master



Behind his paper he watched the man with the briefcase

"One of Us Is Going to Win," the Griffin Warned Investigator Manning. "That One Is—Myself!"

By J. Allan Dunn

THERE were no windows to the curious room, elliptically shaped, the high walls in one continuous curve with no visible sign of a door. Diffused and mellow light flowed in from unseen mysterious sources. There was ample ventilation. From somewhere, diminished, rather than faint from distance, music sounded, music orchestrated in the ultra-modern school that some call decadent. Music that stirred the physical emotions rather than exalted the mind or stimulated the spirit. Not the strident, strenuous phases of jazz, but insinuating melodies, rhythms that seemed to suggest exotic landscapes, the glidings of great, gorgeous snakes, the flight of rainbow-plumaged birds, the fall of crystal waters—lovers watched upon by lurking, creeping ape-men.

The walls were tapestried in two shades of gold, dull and burnished, in a pattern that did not obtrude yet made itself manifest. The carpet, ankle deep, was of rare weave, matching the walls. There was a hint of incense, of burning amber. And a strange atmosphere of evil, an influence that abused beauty and harmony, twisted them to its own malignant purposes.

Those walls back of the golden tap-

estries were of steel. The place was at once a sanctum and a stronghold. The ceiling curved in a shallow dome. On its background of dark blue, certain constellations were accurately inlaid in gold. Two signs of the zodiac, in conjunction, and their attendant stars.

Here and there were divans, deep cushions on the floor. A high chest of black wood with inlays of pearl and ivory, actually a safe of the most modern construction. A chair, carved, like a throne, back of a carved table. On the table a strip of ancient woven silk, once the back of a Manchu princess's robe; a crystal globe, slotted at the top with openings for air, three-quarters filled with water into which streamed constantly a jet of compressed air. Emerald weeds waved and contorted goldfish swam solemnly through the subaqueous jungle.

There was a disk of smooth copper-gilt suspended in a frame of ivory. On either side of this smaller replicas. A tablet of white porcelain, illuminated from beneath, on which a man was making notes and calculations with a stylus of agate tipped with lead.

The whole place was bizarre. It might have been the abode of an astrologer, a mystic. The seated figure should have worn a pointed cap, a robe inscribed with cabalistic characters, a long beard.

Instead, there was a clean-shaved man in modern dress. His face was the most arresting thing in the room. At the moment it was calm, cold, rigid, almost, as an ivory mask and nearly as colorless. But the eyes gleamed like jewels; hard, brilliant, the eyes of a fanatic or a madman whose brain, while erratic, still retained control. It was in the eyes that the malignant influence of the room seemed to concentrate, perhaps to emanate.

The features were, in their way, beautiful, but they were stamped with a predatory cast. The lips were thin, cruel, the nose a finely chiseled beak, the whole face dominating. The ears well shaped, but the ears of a faun, pointing up to crisp hair, silver-gray that did not give so much the suggestion of age, but of virility that lacked pigment. The only lines were two scores that ran from nostrils to the ends of the mouth.

This was the man who called himself the Crime Master. He might, as he looked, have been a fallen archangel, hurled from Heaven, intent upon revenge. He was an arch-enemy of society, of the world of finance, nursing injuries that, in his warped brain, had mounted until he was a foe to all established foundations of modern civilization.

A gong sounded, with a light, sweet note. The music ceased. A voice thin but distinct came from the smaller disks, synchronized. He listened intently, a smile, that lacked all kindness, deepening the brackets about his mouth.

He spoke into the big disk. His voice was smooth, silken-smooth, but forceful, exultant, mocking. He gave swift instructions. Then, as the music once more crept in, he erased, with a moist felt, all that had been on the tablet of porcelain, now transferred to a memory of intense energy annd reception; made another note—a date, and regarded it with the same smile. His long, thin fingers folded themselves about each other. Then, with a swift movement, subtle rather than sudden, he brought heavy paper from a drawer, dipped a quill pen into violet ink, held in a well of onyx whose lid was the head of a griffin, the mythical winged lion, and wrote quickly, still smiling; folding the

letter with a chuckle that suggested the soft gurgle of an eddy on the Styx, or of the sacred river of Kublai Khan, running through caverns measureless to man, down to a sunless sea; addressed the envelope, sealed it.

"So," he said softly. "It appears we have a worthy opponent. The real game commences."

He pressed a silver button in the desk-top. From a deeper drawer he drew out a mask that seemed made of gold-leaf, pliant but distinctive, changing his features to the semblance of an Egyptian relief of the Hawk-God. Now he looked not unlike the griffin lid of the inkwell, the device that was on the scarlet seal that closed the letter.

The gong sounded twice. With his foot he pressed on the heavy carpet and a section of the wall slid noiselessly aside. A man appeared, a valet, his sign of service the wasp-striped waistcoat he wore, a human automaton, expressionless.

"See that this is mailed at the Grand Central post office by four this afternoon."

The Crime Master felt in the pocket of his coat, brought forth a tiny box of gold, damascened, enlivened with small, sparkling and exquisitely cut gems. In it was a green paste—hasheesh.

Five minutes later he was at full length on a divan, the phantasies of the hempen extract mingling with the music that now played more and more faintly, lulling him to sleep and dreams. His features relaxed, but they did not lose that stamp of enmity.

II

THE wise old trainer, owner of Garrity's Gymnasium, looked with professional interest and approval at Gordon Manning, coming out briskly from the needle shower after his daily handball game.

"There you have a man who keeps himself fit," said Garrity to a new and somewhat paunchy patron. "Always *has* kept fit, if I know anything, and there's not much in the line of athletics he couldn't get away with, if he put his mind to it. As it is, there's worse boxers an' wrestlers swaggerin' round, thinkin' they're champs."

"He doesn't look such a marvel to me," said the other, watching Manning closely, a little enviously, as the latter came striding naked from the shower cabinets, lean and lithe. "You wouldn't call him much on muscle."

"You wouldn't? Next time you git a chance, you take a look at the limbs of them chimpanzees out to the Bronx Zoo. You won't *see* much muscle on them. They're skinny, those chimps, they look stringy, but they can take apart a man twice their weight an' size.

"It's quality that counts. Know anything more muscular than a snake? One of them big boas? See any muscles bulgin' on them? Manning is built the same way. His muscles are like first-class rubber bands. They've got resilience. His brain's the same way. Watch him play handball and you'll get what I mean. Coördination."

"What does he do? Anything?"

"He's some sort of a lawyer. I know he's got offices down on Liberty Street. I know he was the youngest major in the A. E. F. where I was top sergeant. An' I'm dead sure he don't loaf. He couldn't, not his sort, any more'n quicksilver'll stay put."

The listener was impressed, almost against his will. There *was* something out of the ordinary about Manning, his poise, the carriage of his spare person, the lift of head and chin, a certain pride that was not offensive, a suggestion of

proved efficiency. Perhaps the trainer had not exaggerated, after all.

"Now you, sir," said Garrity bluntly. "You've got a nice body, but you've abused it. You want to take it easy at first. I'll start you off with the medicine ball. There's a class of gents ready to start in a few minutes."

While the pudgy, somewhat puffy patron turned toward the gym, Manning dressed rapidly, left the place and walked the few blocks to his office, lithe as an Indian, though with a freer tread, swinging his cane. His face was thoughtful.

That was a curious cane he carried, heavier than it appeared. It was made of rings of leather shrunk about a steel core whose end made the ferrule, while the head was capped with a plain gold band bearing the initials G. M. in modest script. A weapon, rather than a cane. The only weapon Manning carried, as a rule, no matter how dangerous his errand, but one that, in the hands of a skillful and powerful man, was formidable, deadly. And even Garrity did not know that Manning was an expert fencer.

He came to his office building, tall though not one of the latest, sandwiched in between others on a strip of land that ran between two streets. There were four elevators, one of them an express, stopping first on the seventh floor, where Manning had his office suite. One car was temporarily out of order, as announced by the card on the grille. The starter gave Manning a military salute. Manning answered it in swift gesture of authority, now discarded yet still recognized by a few.

The car shot up, stopped. The operator opened the door with a friendly grin. They didn't know much about Manning's affairs in the building, but any public servant gets to be a good judge of people he sees every day.

On the outer door of Manning's suite his name appeared above the two words that seemed to designate his profession.

GORDON MANNING
Advisory Attorney

But there was only one man in New York, anywhere, besides himself, who knew Manning's true vocation. So he believed. And hoped.

There was an intelligent-looking red-headed youth in his outer room, two women stenographers in the next, deft, deferential, businesslike. His personal office was well but not luxuriously furnished. In one corner stood a circular safe of ultra-hardened steel, practically impregnable—and empty—though no one knew that but Manning.

It seemed all it was intended to represent, the obvious repository of secrets. It would take experts hours to get into it. And it was only a lure. Manning kept his secrets accurately filed in a trained memory, supplemented by a condensed file in a cypher that he had improved upon from many he had studied. That file was in his desk, ingeniously concealed.

Manning never appeared in court. He had clients, though they were not so numerous as important. He oftener refused advice than gave it. His fees were large, but his cases, turned over to other attorneys for action, did not occupy all his time. Yet, to those who took occasion to comment on him, he was a man of little leisure, of comparatively few friends though many acquaintances. None knew him intimately. He was cordial enough but reserved, although he was not consided an enigma.

He took seat in his desk chair, gazing out to the towers of Manhattan,

lining the busy river, with its spidery bridges, its teeming commerce. The window was open, the sounds of the metropolis blended in a symphony of achievement.

His dark eyes were like those of a hawk, or an eagle, made for the fathoming of far perspectives, far-seeing, eager, with a certain fierceness that came into them now. His body lounged, at ease, relaxed, but his mind was centered on a desperate and dangerous quest. He sought a man, a universal enemy of the powers that had built up the city he loved, the greatest city in the world, New York. He sought him in secret and stern resolve, the man who had mocked, was still mocking, at the police—looting, murdering at will, head, without question, of a band that was not only devoted to him, or linked by rites of deviltry, but infinitely resourceful under the direction of their head. The Griffin.

Manning frowned. He admitted himself worried. It was never known where, when or how the Griffin would strike, and he had never failed. Mad perhaps, with a species of insanity that might some day burn out his inflamed brain, but, meanwhile, made it that of an evil genius.

He swung his chair to the desk, always clear of papers not under immediate consideration. He had been set to the trail, but he could find no starting point, no scent toward the following of it, the solution of the mystery that gripped him. The Griffin left no traces, save those of devastation. No clews.

Manning was fresh to the trail, but there was a long count against the offender—the man who had no name that is to say, no name unless it was revealed in a device he used, embossed on—ovals of heavy paper, cartouches he affixed as tokens of his presence—of his absence from the scene of crime—or token that he was the master-mind who originated it.

A device that was the head of the mythical creature known to heraldry as a griffin, stamped in scarlet.

It might, Manning fancied, be a clew to the surname of the man, who seemed more fiend than human. But that was only a fancy and he wanted facts.

It was a waiting game he was forced to play and that harassed him. The hideous certainty that the Griffin would reveal himself, stagger the city with some fresh crime that would come like a bolt from the blue, stagger the very foundations of law and order, without warning, without trace of the offenders.

These acts were like those of the fictional Frankenstein, shaped like a man, minded like a fiend. A fiend of frightfulness and inordinate cunning, of illimitable daring and deviltry, heading an organization growing ever bolder with success.

Manning signed some letters, summoned one of the stenographers, dictated, ran through typed documents, digesting their contents, arriving at solutions. But all the time his brow was furrowed.

His subconscious brain busied itself with the main issue for which his business was only a camouflage. It held a presage of impending trouble that he was powerless to prevent, though he must trace its source. He knew he was up against no ordinary opponent, but one as resourceful and relentless as any he had encountered in his duties in the war opposing the Boche Secret Service.

He finished up the correspondence, gave a word of praise to the girl and got his car from its parking space, eas-

ing the powerful but unostentatious machine through the traffic, driving with automatic accuracy, his mind ever prescient of impending calamity, out to Grand Concourse, through the park, on to his home in Pelham Manor, a bachelor establishment catered to by his picked Japanese servants, perfect if remote.

All the way his eyes, that saw the traffic, the lights, were conning with their eagle gaze for an elusive quarry, a fabulous beast, a scarlet griffin.

III

AS Manning picked up the square envelope with its bold superscription in violet ink, he had a premonition, perhaps of the quickened senses, a positive emotion or reaction; that here was something evil. He did not analyse such matters. He believed that all hunches were based upon actualities, that so-called luck was merely the blossom, or the fruit of seed some one had sewed where perhaps he might not pluck.

But he had seen many curious things in his time. In the war, when he was detailed on Secret Service though ostentatiously merely a brass hat. In the Orient and the far-off places he had traveled since the war. He would not have disputed that vibrations for good or wickedness might not persist, did not cling, as some subtle odor, to objects handled by persons of strong vitality and will.

And here was evil. As if the envelope had been defiled by a malignant touch. He opened it without hesitation, abruptly.

> My dear Manning:
>
> Allow me to exchange congratulations with you upon your acceptance of the post you have just taken over. I take it that, with myself, it is not entirely the pursuit of—shall we call it crime?—that interests you, whether to achieve or prevent it; but that the adventure of the chase appeals.
>
> It does to me. I trust we shall share many interesting and thrilling episodes. I am complimented, spurred by having such an adversary. It inspires me to further efforts. I fear that we shall never meet. I may, ultimately, have to make sure of that. In the meantime, until you push me too hard, and I grant that possible emergency, I shall thoroughly enjoy playing the game with you.
>
> It is like playing chess with a skilled opponent. A game in which, however, you labor under a handicap. I always make the first move. Let us pit our resources against each other. We might perhaps both be called Crime Masters. But it will be no stalemate. One of us is going to win. Myself. For, if you seek to master crime, I am its master.
>
> You will hear from me soon. Very soon. I much prefer to dealing with you direct.

There was no signature, only the embossed griffin's head, with its rapacious beak, its rampant attitude, stamped on an oval of bright red, scarlet as blood.

IV

IT was a shock, an unexpected blow from an unseen adversary; rather, not so much a blow as a flick of insult, a challenge.

The man known to the police as the Griffin had, attested the mute evidence of his scarlet seal, committed many crimes. He had robbed, he had at times killed with what seemed mere, diabolical wantonness. His coups were always coupled with great gains, carried out with a precision that bespoke an evil genius in conception and preparation.

He might, Manning reflected, be well termed the Crime Master, juggling the words to make the meaning suit his successes, though, as he had written,

they could be twisted to have an opposite interpretation, one that Manning meant to make apposite—to himself—as one who mastered crime.

It would be a hard-fought game, not played in the open, with the quarry always well away. The letter told one thing. The Griffin was a man of education, of sardonic humor, with a brilliant, if warped, brain. The use of the seal already indicated that.

The writing, Manning was sure, would lead nowhere. He did not doubt the other's ability to write several distinctive hands, carefully studied. He had shown an infinite capacity for taking pains.

As for the paper and the postmark, if a clever criminal was careful, they were useless as clews. Only the amateur, the person of one, sudden crime, forgot details. The Griffin was a professional.

Every little while, at intervals of weeks or months, a crime tagged by the seal was perpetrated. Every little while, press and public clamored for the police to apprehend him. They suspected Centre Street of concealing the use of the seals in certain cases—and they were not away from the truth.

The chief commissioner, with his newly appointed squad of secret police, could do nothing with the Griffin. He worked alone, he was not a gangster, a racketeer. The commissioner had called in the aid of Manning, enlisted it, a willing volunteer. They had held, so far, no communication, would hold none until Manning had tracked this beast, run it to earth, destroyed it, or been destroyed himself. Yet, the Griffin had discovered his employment. It was something close to magic, which is merely the mystery of the unknown.

Manning accepted it as a fact. There was no use taking time to determine what indiscretion had freed the information. A harassed man might mutter in his sleep. Gossip flies far and often it links are intangible.

It was not himself. He slept soundly. He slept apart. The thing was out. The Griffin had learned of the appointment and, in his bizarre fashion, it had given him greater zest to prove his own powers, to show himself the Crime Master.

"A form of grandiose dementia," Manning diagnosed it. There was nothing to do but wait for the fulfillment of that promised "very soon," to wait for that "opening move" which would be fraught with inevitable tragedy, too late to remedy.

The Griffin might overplay his hand. He might not be playing chess so much as hurling boomerangs. So far, none had swung back to destroy him. He was like a wolf, captain of a lupine band, swooping down on defenseless, unsuspecting sheep. And Manning was the shepherd.

He ate dinner by himself, waited on by the imperturbable Japanese who had been with him for years, devoted, impeccable retainers who would protect him if he needed them, who maintained the little house Manning had built from his own plans, secure from intrusion.

After the meal Manning read a review, smoking a pipe. His hoped-for encounter with the Griffin might prove only a battle of wits, but, if it ever came to handgrips, with him or any of his followers, the man would need all of a maniac's strength to cope with Manning.

V

IN Manning's private office the next day the telephone rang crisply, imperatively. It was a private line, unlisted, unconnected with the general

office instrument. As he lifted the receiver he was conscious, almost as if he had received an electric shock, of the same sensation he had experienced with the letter he had received from the Griffin.

A question, doubtless, of vibrations, himself tuned-in, receptive, expectant, his whole being, body and brain, a coherer.

Manning did not consider the voice disguised. It was resonant, but not harsh, cultured, tinged with maleficent humor, mocking.

"Manning," it said. "It is within a few minutes of eleven o'clock. I trust you have standardized time, so you can check the moments. They are quite important.

"Don't try to trace this phone call. It cannot be done. I told you you would hear from me very soon. This is the first move, now in the making. It will be accomplished by eleven o'clock, precisely.

"Then you can get busy and solve the problem, if you can. To use a vulgar idiom, this is being pulled off under your very nose, Manning. I have chosen the man because of his close proximity to you. In a measure, you are responsible for his selection and his demise, his most untimely and unforeseen demise. Not entirely. He has other qualifications, naturally."

Manning glanced at the clock on his desk. It was accurate to a second. He felt that the Griffin—there was no question of his identity—was talking against time. He knew that he could not trace the wire. Others had tried to do that. The Griffin had some method of using the telephone service without automatic cut-in. He was equally sure that the crime now being predicted would be carried out.

The mocking voice kept on.

"I am afraid, my dear Manning, that you are powerless to prevent my coup, but I shall take precautions. We have another seventy odd seconds. It would be too late for you to take advantage of the occasion by buying certain stocks for a swift fall, as I have done. I have no especial enmity against the man chosen, but his death will be very profitable to me. I have an expensive organization to maintain.

"He dies by a new method I have recently perfected. I shall be interested in your failure to uncover it—and me. It will exercise your ingenuity. And the name of the man—"

The clock on Manning's desk began to chime the hour.

He heard his caller chuckle as the strokes went on to four—to five.

"The name is Richard Ordway. Two floors beneath you, my dear Manning. And quite dead by now, I assure you."

Richard Ordway! Private banker, promoter, financier, manipulator. Manning knew him. They were members of the same club. He often saw him in the building. Stocks might well go into turmoil when Ordway died suddenly. There would be a panic on the Exchange, the Curb. Sales that could not be traced in the mad scramble.

And the Griffin, scattering his orders, using his organization, could not be detected. Yet, because of that quirk in his brain, he had thrown down the challenge to Manning.

Manning's wits worked fast. The supreme impudence, the insolence of the call, sent a surge of hot blood through him. His resolve might hardly be strengthened, but it rose within him. And the Griffin, for all his cleverness, had given out something that might yet betray him.

His voice was distinctive. Manning would not forget its inflections. He had landed more than one spy because of certain shadings and intonations, slight accents. He might never hear it again, but—if he did?

He leaped into action, wasting no time. He knew he could not save Ordway, but, before the last stroke had sounded, he was out of his side door into the corridor, hat on, cane and gloves in hand.

The Griffin had, he fancied, overlooked one other matter. He pressed the button, caught the express descending, stepped into the car. On the third floor they overtook the local. When the latter arrived Manning was lounging at the cigar and news stand. He had bought an impromptu but effective mask that he had used before—a newspaper. Like many other individuals in the district, he buried his face in it, seemingly seeking market news.

He had marked the indicator of the other local—the third still out of order. It was at the top of the building. Four people stepped out of the one that had followed his express car. A young clerk, a girl, a man he knew and another man who carried a brief case, well dressed, self-assured, walking swiftly, but showing no especial signs of hurry.

Manning had certain qualities that make up the born detector. He had studied many things. He did not absolutely believe in physiognomy, but there were certain features he considered evinced undeniable traits. He acted now like a hound that has caught the scent.

He was assured that Ordway, up on the fifth floor, was dead. He could not aid him. He was not anxious to uncover himself in any capacity of investigator until he had to. But he followed the man with the brief case, realizing that, if he was a member of the Griffin's organization, he might, would, know him by sight.

Manning knew the tricks of shadowing. At Wall Street and Broadway the man dived into a subway entrance. Manning followed, running to make the express, seeing his quarry enter, two cars ahead. The man kept in the train until Forty-Second Street, and Manning trailed him, up through Grand Central to Madison Avenue.

The man swung aboard a surface car. Manning followed in a taxi, telling the driver what he wanted. A New York taxi driver is surprised by nothing. He scented a hot tip. Above Fifty-Seventh he stopped and Manning saw his man turn a corner. He left the driver grinning over a two-dollar bill.

The hotel was one that harbored all sorts and conditions of people, both men and women, who did not obviously work. There was a lobby and a desk, facing two elevators. Between the cars there was a long mirror, used by the lady guests for a final overlook.

Manning found a pillar, stood back of it, seeing his man in the mirror, marking the pigeonhole from which the clerk gave him his key. He made sure of it as he asked an idle question about an imaginary registration, and then left.

Fifteen minutes later his carefully relayed message got through and was responded to by Rafferty, detective of the old-school, but to be relied upon in ordinary routine. Rafferty had an intimate description of the man, knew the number of the room. It was sufficient.

Manning's instinct told him he was on the right track, but he had to go warily. He was dealing with no or-

dinary opponent. There was no reason for him to arrest his suspect, many reasons not to. Manning did not forget the Griffin's boasted "new method" of killing. He acted on inspiration, based on experience. The Griffin would not have expected him to dash down to the lobby of the building to trace the man. At least, he did not think so.

VI

THE death of Ordway was a sensation. When Manning got back down town it had been long discovered by his secretary, who had been immediately hysterical. All had happened as the Griffin must have hoped. On 'Change the news spread like wildfire. Fortunes were made and lost, matters were still in the balance as Manning arrived.

The police were there. Detectives from the homicide squad. There was nothing to show that Ordway had not died from natural causes. He was slumped over his desk, without mark of a wound.

But an alert reporter had been on the spot. He had seen, pasted on the dead man's blotter, conspicuous, flaunting, the scarlet seal of the Griffin. Already the press was reeling off sensational stories. This time Centre Street could not cover up. The Griffin had struck again.

Newsboys proclaimed it. The Street was in disorder. The panic spread through the length of Manhattan.

And Richard Ordway lay on the operating table while experts tried to find out how he died.

Manning read the report of Rafferty, on a flimsy, sent by ordinary messenger service to his office.

> Suspect traced to Hermes Hotel, room 637, registered as David Sesnon. Checked out at 1.20. Took Yellow taxi 3748, name Alekko Kalimachos—driver has good record. Two bags. Checked in at Hotel Clarence at 1.30, under name of Daniel Sievers. Same initials. Probably careful of laundry marks. Went to barber shop. Shaved off close-clipped mustache and had hair cut. Looks different, but could identify. Took taxi to Pennsylvania Hotel stockbrokers, watched market. Am continuing shadow. R.

There was some delay at the Morgue. Manning insisted on a special autopsy. He believed he had circumvented the Griffin, but he was not congratulating himself beforehand. Sesnon—Sievers, was still under observation, but they had nothing on him, and the Griffin was not to be caught easily.

The observation of the market, powerfully "bear," suggested that the man he had trailed was more than ordinarily interested, but it did not prove it. The latest editions carried the announcement of the police surgeon that Ordway had died of heart failure, but they hinted at other, more sinister reasons.

The grim operation of autopsy was under way. There were two surgeons present, one distinguished specialist supplementing the regular official, by request of the chief commissioner. Assistants in the laboratory searched the organs.

A third man stood with the surgeons. He was accredited, had proved his identity, shown his knowledge of their craft. He made no suggestions. It was Manning, but he was subtly altered. His skin was darkened, his lean cheeks were plumped, his body was cleverly padded. His voice was altered, his movements slow and deliberate. Glasses veiled his eyes, though their eagerness pierced the lenses.

There was nothing, after long in-

vestigation. No sign of a weakened heart, only the body of a man who regularly visited his doctors, who had recently passed a practically perfect test for a vast sum of additional insurance. Dead, he still commanded millions by his demise.

No sign of bullet, of knife. None expected. No trace of known poisons. No unusual traces in any analysis.

Manning had said nothing of his telephone call. This affair was his own. He would conduct it in his own fashion. It could add nothing to their thorough search. The scarlet seal proclaimed that murder had been done, but the men of science stood baffled.

There were no bruises, no discolorations on the body. A blemish or two, a mole, blotches that looked like slight eruptions, lesser pimples, such as might appear on the skin of any man.

A ghastly spectacle, though the proceedings had been conducted with dignity.

Manning moved closer, under the powerful overhead light. He looked at the reddish marks, one in particular.

He knew of poisons in the Far East, largely vegetable ones that, even when introduced into the blood, would be absorbed within an hour or so by the tissues, leave no trace by any reactions known to Occidental science, if to Oriental.

"Would you mind examining this mark closely?" he asked the surgeons. "It looks like a half-healed eruption, there seems to be a slight trace of what might be pus. I have a theory it may not be."

His credentials and his manner, his knowledge, made them deferential. They were willing enough to try anything, perplexed, weary.

An incision was made, the pallid and bloodless flesh removed about the spot, the specimen taken off for minute observation.

Manning was examining the dead man's coat when they got back, regarding critically a slight stain, almost invisible, on the sleeve.

"We find no trace of anything toxic," said the specialist. "But there has been a parting of the tissues, not by any sharp instrument, hardly discernible. The curious thing is that stearine, wax of some sort, seems to have been injected. We have not yet determined its exact composition."

"Exactly," said Manning. "And the mark, as you will see, was on the shoulder, beneath this spot on the sleeve. I think you will find your stearine also there. It should show slightly on his shirt. His undervest was sleeveless.

They gazed with animation, energetic to follow his theory, though they did not see what it would prove.

The stain on the fine weave of cloth, on the linen of the shirt, swiftly yielded results. A waxy substance was held in the fibers.

"It passed through," said Manning. "A pellet of wax that has almost dissolved, but not so thoroughly as its contents. You may know that a candle can be fired through a board from a gun. This capsule, loaded with virulent poison, was probably discharged from an air pistol. Probably at close range.

"That, I think, is the cause of death. As for the poison, there are several, not classified, their source in doubt, that I have met with in the Malay peninsula, Borneo, and other places. Unless you can think of some reason why stearine should have been injected through the coat, the shirt and shoulder of such a man as Ordway, immaculate, precise.

There was no such reason and they knew it, all of them, standing about the riven body.

"Damnable!" said one of them. "Damnable! No doubt as to who did it. That fiend must be found."

"I agree with you," said Manning.

"We are much indebted to you," said the specialist. "I wish I knew more of you. Your name."

"I am afraid," said Manning dryly, "that that pleasure, my pleasure, surely will have to be deferred, doctor. I am known only by my finger whorls. You gentlemen need me no longer. You will bring in your findings without me."

"Those findings are indefinite enough to be losings," said the official surgeon ruefully. "Convincing enough to us. But—"

He shrugged his shoulders. Manning bowed to them and went out with his slow, assumed walk.

"You'd almost think he knew what to look for," an assistant ventured.

"That's nonsense, Edwards," snapped the specialist. "We don't know who he is, but his credentials are irreproachable. But, my God, what a devilish device! And advertising his crime with that red seal!"

"The Griffin, if it ever existed," said his colleague, "is extinct. I only trust this one will be soon exterminated. They ought to set this man who was here to-night, whoever he is, on his trail. He might cope with him."

VII

MANNING saw that the key to Sesnon's new room in his new hotel, under the name of Sievers, was in the box and he, presumably, in his room.

Manning had already heard Ordway's secretary, in a calmer mood, confirm the arrival of a man with a brief case, giving the name of Sesnon, who had an appointment with Ordway.

That appointment must have been gained through excellent credentials, which may have been manufactured. The main bait had been what he could offer Ordway. Of that, save that it had something to do with an asbestos mine near the Pennsylvania-New Jersey line, the secretary knew little. Ordway kept such profitable matters to himself until he was ready to use them. Long-fibered asbestos in any place easily reached was a thing men had long looked for.

A second appointment had been granted in which, presumably, Ordway would have the tests of the asbestos. Sesnon would give out the exact details, and an expert would be sent secretly to investigate. It was all a blind, and Ordway, trying to make money with himself on the big end, had lost his life.

With his death the pool that he was manipulating was drained dry. His own estate suffered, but many, forewarned, henchmen of the Griffin, made money. Money was the cold-blooded motive for the Griffin's selection of Ordway, coupled with the fact that the "first move" since Manning had taken hold, took place beneath the latter's nose. If anything could have urged Manning on, this semiresponsibility did so.

So far Sesnon was tied up with his arrival in the lobby after the murder. Manning's intuition, his judgment, had been correct. Now the trail led to the Hotel Clarence, and Manning followed it, alone.

The case was far from complete. That trace of stearine in cloth and flesh was not conclusive. The poison had been assimilated. But, if Sesnon—

alias Sievers—could be found with poison pellets in his possession, with the air pistol that fired them, they had him. With the vision of the chair facing him he might well talk about the Griffin.

Manning had arrived in a cab, with a kit bag. He registered, looked at Sievers's signature casually, got his own room and followed the boy with his kit bag. He was not on the same floor as Sievers, but that did not matter. He knew the number of the latter's room. It was a sweltering night and the heat suggested a plan, not too novel, but efficient.

He got Sesnon's phone through the hotel exchange. The answer brought a grim smile to Manning's face. He had run the quarry to earth. Sesnon was clever, but Manning did not think he believed himself in any danger, though he had taken precautious of changing appearance, shifting his hotel, taking another name. The rub came in the question as to whether he had got rid of his lethal weapon and ammunition. That would soon be known.

"Did you want a fan?" Manning asked the man at the other end of the wire. "This is the engineer. I can have one sent up right away."

"I didn't order one," the answer came back, "but I could sure use one. You must have got the wrong room."

"Sorry, sir. I'll shoot one up to you."

Two minutes later Manning knocked on the door. As it was opening he spoke his piece.

"Here's your fan, sir." Then he was inside. He had no fan. He had no gun. But he wore his hat, and he carried his cane. He had sprung a surprise, but he had one given to him. There were two men in the room, both with their coats off. There was a whisky bottle on the table, with ice and soda water. Both rose to their feet as Manning strolled in. And both evidently knew him.

The amazing thing was that they might have been twins. Hair cut, general features, coloring, height, weight, and make-up were startlingly similar. Suits and ties were similar.

One was Sesnon, one his "ghost." His appearance was probably brought about for use in drawing off a "tail," if there was any. In all likelihood routine instructions, rather than alarm, for Sesnon regarded Manning coolly enough. It showed the quality of the Crime Master's brain, the action of the expert player, looking moves ahead for all possible plays and contingencies.

Again Manning acknowledged the Griffin's resourcefulness. The man's methods were bold and subtle. He was like a slippery eel that, even when seemingly caught, slides through the hand and leaves only slime behind.

Manning knew which was which.

"What do you want?" asked Sesnon. The presence of his seeming twin did not actually involve him. He might or might not admit that he had called on Ordway. It was not necessarily criminal to shave or shift his hotel. He knew nothing of the results of the autopsy though he might now suspect he had been trailed. He was still confident.

"I want you, Sievers, or Sesnon, for the murder of Ordway. I myself traced you from his office. Also I know how he was killed."

Sievers did not flinch. His eyes narrowed slightly.

"Which of us are you talking to?" he asked.

"You. When you made your changes, Sesnon, you forgot to put in different sleeve links. There will be no

question about your identity. I'm taking you both. I have two men in the lobby to take you down. Stand still, the pair of you."

He saw their glances meet, shift quickly and obliquely to the window. It gave out to a narrow alley. Not the best room in the hotel, but it had one advantage for their kind. It was a fire exit.

Sesnon's double moved silently and swiftly. His right hand swung up—inside his partly open vest. The wrist halted, his fingers clutching for a gun. There would be a good tale for the Griffin. The latter had impressed them with the cleverness of Manning, and here they had him. The gun was muffled. There was nothing to it. Let the two dicks stay in the lobby. They would get clear.

Then he grunted—and then he gasped.

The steel ferrule, with a flick of Manning's wrist, had hit and paralyzed his own, as the end of the snaky, but heavy cane struck a carpal bone where the radius joined it.

The cane circled, shot forward, stabbed him in the belly. It lifted in a *sabreur's* sweep and tapped him over the ear. He lost all interest in the proceedings. It took but a second.

But, in that second Sesnon had hurled himself upon Manning, striving to throw him, to knock him out. He had no weapon on him, from sheer precaution, a carefulness overdone in this case. He was powerful, trained, and imagined easy conquest, astounded to find himself grasping a body that was sheathed in muscle and hard flesh, that turned his attack to defense.

He had grasped Manning's right wrist and Manning let his cane fall. He held a private satisfaction in tackling this murderer with his bare hands. He tied Sesnon in the fierce clinch, held him, and flung him loose, bewildered at the expert handling—loose for a moment—then Manning's uppercut traveled from his hip and connected.

It was all over. Sesnon fell like a length of chain, his coördination unlinked.

Manning went over him, went over the "ghost" and found little of value, save money, with which both were plentifully supplied. Then he called the office, spoke crisply to the clerk:

"Two men there in the lounge. They're from headquarters. Send them up here, right away."

He had two of Griffin's men in the toils, but there was not much to hold them on, save suspicion and limited circumstantial evidence for Sesnon, a Sullivan act charge for his "ghost." No jury was going to convict them of murder. There was no positive evidence that Ordway had died of anything administered externally. Only opinion, and a scanty showing of grease that an expert lawyer would laugh off. They would undoubtedly have the best legal advice. Unless Manning found the stearine pellets and the gun, found them soon, in Sesnon's room they would be out on bail.

Yet he could hardly have arrested Sesnon on his first hunch that he was the murderer. Now he almost took the room apart and found nothing. The pair were taken away. They would get a good sweating, a rousing third degree. Sesnon, nursing a sore jaw, affected to be jaunty. The "ghost" was still feeling too sick from the jabs and strokes of Manning's cane to say anything.

"We won't be there long," Sesnon boasted.

Manning relayed through to Centre

Street, asking to have the two held as long as possible, but he did not doubt that the Griffin would soon get busy. Because of his minute examination he should be certain the poison pellets and gun were not in the room, but he was not satisfied.

He went over the search again. Then he retained the room for himself. It was midnight when he once more got through to the commissioner. He had found his evidence. Sesnon had hidden the pistol with a cunning worthy of the Griffin himself.

He had wrapped it in black cloth, a small parcel, for the gun could rest in the palm of the hand. He had wired it underneath the grating of the fire escape, close to the building. It was practically invisible and might have stayed there for months, though no doubt some stranger would have visited that room later, another of the Griffin's emissaries, and removed it. It was a marvelous piece of mechanism, loaded with a tiny capsule of wax, ready for deadly action.

If Sesnon had been able to use it on Manning, the duel for crime mastery would have ended then and there. He had evidently found Sesnon almost ready to leave, not wishing to destroy the gun, not caring to chance carrying it with him any longer.

Strenuous efforts had been made to admit them to bail. Big Jake himself, most famous—and infamous—of mouthpieces, had left guests and tried to spring them. Politicians had been busy. Any amount would have been put up. The Griffin had scored heavily in the falling market. Bail money would be negligible compared to his profits.

But they were still held. Sesnon would have to stand trial for murder. Yet they were faithful. What hold the Griffin held on them could not be shaken. Promises, bullying, long hours of "degree" got nothing out of them. They knew nothing of the Griffin. Nothing. Then or afterward.

Manning drove home to Pelham Manor in the small hours, well satisfied though tired. He ran the car into the garage, went, patent key in hand, to his front door. The inlet of the lock was covered with a scarlet cartouche, red as blood, the head of a Griffin stamped upon it.

One Way to Halt a Jailbreak

ALTHOUGH handicapped by a wooden leg, "Pegleg," or "Peggy" Watkins, male colored prisoner, calmly walked out of police court at Hyattsville, Md., recently when no one was looking. "Peggy" took to the swamps and it was several weeks before he could be located. Even on being sighted Watkins ran so fast with his wooden leg that officers of the law did not catch him for half an hour.

Brought back to the court Watkins was deposited in the corner farthest from the door. And to insure that he wouldn't evaporate a second time, his wooden leg was removed and placed safely behind the Judge's bench.

The Radio Killer

A True Story

As the man fled he opened fire

Assigned to Trap the Murderer Who Steals Radio Sets, Two New Detectives Look for Him at a Ball Game

By Howard McLellan

IN the long list of notable crimes that have occupied the attention of the New York Police Department the sensational exploits of the Queens Radio Killer occupy a unique place. For months this lone-wolf operator stood the entire department on its toes and kept it gasping by his murderous trick of shooting policemen in approximately the same spot on the left side of their necks. Four times he stood within arm's reach of men sent out to get him, and yet each time he escaped leaving his blue-coated victims writhing in agony upon the sidewalk with a paralyzing wound in their necks.

From the standpoint of the professional detective the investigation which led to his capture approaches perfection. No case in recent years has afforded a better demonstration of the operation of deductive faculties in the practical detective mind.

Up until the winter of 1925 the borough of Queens was one of the quietest suburban residential sections in New York City. Peopled by families of the working-class, the modest homes

of Queens offered no great attraction to thieves. Here after a day of toil in the congested mecca across the East River workers were assured restful quiet and safe seclusion from thieves in the small one and two-family dwellings which they were paying for as they went along.

In the flash of a few weeks preceding Christmas, 1925, all this changed. Quiet Queens became Noisy Queens. A craze for building radio sets seized the householders. Homes that were thought immune from predatory attack because of their lack of valuable luxury became targets for a mysterious prowler, who took nothing but home-built radio sets and wallets containing papers of value only to the owner.

Of the two hundred thousand odd homes in the borough probably only a handful were without home-made equipment to pluck entertainment from the ether. When families sat down to their evening meal dials were turned on and not turned off until two or three in the morning, when the last available station signed off. For hours the night and early morning air was loaded with a potpourri of speech and music.

The quality of the programs was of less interest to the set builders than the fact that their outfits were demonstrably louder and clearer than their neighbors', and could get more distant stations. Rabid radio fans were known to rush out of their homes at an ungodly hour of the morning and, in voices heard for a block, announce triumphantly that they had caught Havana and Tokyo. Sometimes they were challenged to prove it, and presently the author of the announcement would be seen rushing pell-mell toward the challenger's home, with his home-built set under his arm to show his rival that his outfit would do all that he claimed for it.

They were all very proud of their sets, but utterly unconscious of the fact that their activity in radio production was creating a stock of valuables of special interest to a pair of thieving eyes and two ears finely tuned to appraise the value of radio sets by what he heard coming from them.

In the course of three weeks forty-two of the best home-built sets were missing from Queens homes, together with wallets containing personal papers. No cheap sets were taken. The thief made entry with a jimmy deftly applied to front and back windows while housewives were out shopping or getting their fill of visual entertainment in neighborhood movie theaters.

Fifty plain-clothes men were thrown into Queens by Chief Inspector "Roaring" John Coughlin, head of the Detective Division. Patrolmen were ordered to double tours of duty. Whereupon the thief switched his operations from daylight to after midnight hours. The thefts continued, unabated. No one saw the prowler. The police had no description of him. The giant crime war map which covers the walls of a large room adjoining the office of Chief Inspector Coughlin showed Queens dotted with red-topped pins, each pin indicating the scene of a radio burglary. Queens home-owners were warned to muffle their sets.

Radio was a new thing, and the Bureau of Criminal Identification had not yet been put to the necessity of adding to its list of criminals specializing in one kind of theft the new classification of radio burglar. Policemen on night duty in Queens were ordered to accost all persons found on the

streets after midnight carrying bundles that might be radio sets. A hundred or more radio bugs were halted, but they turned out to be fans going from one house to another to demonstrate the exceptional merits of their home-built outfits.

Dealers in used radio sets were investigated in the hope of finding one who had bought a set stolen from a Queens home. One dealer was found who had such a set, but his memory was deplorably poor when he was asked to describe the man who had sold him the stolen set. This dealer's shop was located near Third Avenue and Fourteenth Street, a section of the lower East Side of New York much frequented by fences.

The thefts continued even while additional police were being poured into Queens. In the face of a total lack of information as to the description of the mysterious prowler Coughlin and his staff built conjecture. The thief was either an expert on radio or a lover of that form of entertainment, or both. He took only the best home-built sets. Why he took apparently valueless wallets remained a mystery. His manipulation of his jimmy indicated experience as a burglar of the cat type, and probably a man who would kill to make his get-away.

He preferred Queens because it was possible for him to walk along the sidewalks in front of the one and two-family houses, listen to the output of the radio sets, determine their quality and mark a selected house for visitation. It would have been impossible for him to have made these selections in an apartment house filled with many tenants and guarded by caretakers.

By the end of January, 1926, one hundred and twenty-three of the finest home-built radio sets in Queens had fallen into his hands. Owners of good sets silenced them, yet the thefts continued. After dark Queens became almost as quiet as it had been before the craze for home-built sets struck the borough.

It was an ominous lull, relieved only by the somewhat spectral forms of minions of the law walking the streets from midnight until dawn haunting the section for just a glimpse of the mysterious intruder.

A few minutes after midnight on February 26, 1926, the slow, measured beat of rubber-heeled shoes along a sidewalk in the Woodhaven section of Queens ceased and Patrolman Jacob Biegel took up a watchful stance on an unlighted street corner. He expected that momentarily his brother officer on the adjoining beat would come up to exchange notes and discuss arrangements for a midnight cup of coffee.

The patter of feet sounded down the block, and Biegel could indistinctly make out the form of a tall, slender man coming toward him in the tar-black darkness. As he came closer the patrolman saw that the man wore a light gray cap pulled well down over his eyes, a light tan overcoat, and that under his right arm he carried a box about the size of a suitcase.

Biegel stepped up to him. "Kind of late, buddy," he said. "What's the call this time of night?"

The man raised his head slightly. "Oh, I'm legitimate, all right," he grinned.

"Show me," said Biegel.

"That's easy," the man snickered. "I'll show you my papers." He reached into the inner pocket of his coat and brought out a fistful of papers. Biegel bent to inspect them. The man's hand went back into his pocket and whipped out a revolver. He held it close to the

patrolman's neck and fired. The bullet entered the muscles of Biegel's neck and staggered him. He sank to the pavement. The man darted across the street. Biegel lifted himself to his knees and fired as his assailant vaulted a high board fence in the rear of a small home and vanished.

A few weeks later Biegel recovered from his wound, but his observations of the man were of no value. The pulled down cap had hidden his features, and before the policeman could decipher in the darkness anything that might have been on the papers the man had fired and had then jerked the papers away. This much, however, Biegel knew: the man was about twenty-six, tall, slender, and as fleet as a deer; that his voice was soft and had a semblance of culture in it, and that he wore good clothes, a new gray cap and an expensive-looking overcoat.

The wounding of the policeman stirred headquarters to feverish activity. Additional detectives were thrown into Queens, and patrolmen on night duty were ordered to doff their uniforms and walk their posts in civilian dress.

The burglaries continued.

A month later to the day, Patrolman Arthur Kenny, a rotund, good-natured minion of the law, and his partner, Frank Donnolly, were on plain-clothes duty not far from the spot where Biegel was shot down. At 3 A.M. they were attracted by the sound of mincing footsteps hurrying along the sidewalk half a block away. It was a black night, and it was some time before they made out the figure of a man as he turned into a patch of lawn in front of a double-story two-family house. They hurried along and came up to the house as an electric light went on in the front hall of the house. Kenny went up to the front door and, with drawn revolver, stood guard, while Donnolly hurried around to the rear entrance, drew his gun and rattled the knob on the door. It was dark within, but presently the door was opened and a man's voice called out, "Yes, what is it?"

"Let me in," Donnolly commanded, stepping in through the open door.

"What for?" the man demanded. "I'm the man of the house."

"Never mind that," said the patrolman. "Let's have a look at you up here in the light." Donnolly stepped toward the front of the house.

"Here's who I am," said the man, fumbling into the inner pocket of his coat and drawing out papers. Donnolly bent to look at the papers, and as he did so he lowered his revolver. The man's hand shot back into his pocket and came out gripping a revolver. He shot Donnolly in the left side of the neck, precisely at the point where Biegel was hit. The patrolman staggered and fell to his knees. The man lunged out through the back door. Donnolly fired at him, but missed.

Kenny, at the front door, heard the shot and sped around to the rear, reaching a small yard just as Donnolly's assailant vaulted a fence. Kenny fired at him as he vanished, and then entered the house to find Donnolly crouched in a corner with his hand over the wound in his neck.

"Get that guy," cried Donnolly. "I'm hit, but not bad."

Kenny bolted out the door, took the fence at a leap and, gaining the street, looked for his man. The street was dark and deserted. Halfway down the block was a blind alley, and the patrolman made for this. He reached the corner and stood there for a moment with drawn gun, circling his eyes in every direction. A man came up to him

in the dark. Kenny levelled his gun at him.

"Don't shoot," said the man, looking down at Kenny's gun. "I'm a policeman." He held out his open hand and Kenny saw a shield in it. Since the section was honeycombed with plain-clothes men, and the shield which the man flashed in the dark looked like a police badge, Kenny lowered his gun.

"Did you see anybody running down this way?" Kenny asked.

"About five minutes ago I saw a man going down that way," said the man, pointing back over Kenny's left shoulder. The patrolman turned to look in the direction indicated.

He was shot in the left side of the neck and mortally wounded. The man fled as Kenny reeled and sank to the sidewalk. He succumbed to his wound on April 6. Donnolly recovered.

Neither patrolman could amplify the meager information in possession of headquarters. They had encountered their assailant in the dark and were only able to verify what Biegel had observed. The man had a soft voice, was about twenty-seven years old, and had the speed of a deer. He was attired in a light soft hat and wore no overcoat. As near as the two officers could tell, he wore a red scarf about his neck.

To the supplemental general alarm that went out from headquarters following the shooting of Kenny and Donnolly this word of caution was added:

> Re Radio Burglar: Look out for the inside coat pocket gun stall. He will reach into coat pocket ostensibly for identification papers and pull gun. Use utmost caution in approaching suspects. Watch both hands.

On the night of the day this alarm went out the Radio Burglar, who was now carried on police bulletins as the Radio Killer, increased his score of thefts by two fine radio outfits taken from homes within a stone's throw of the spot where Kenny was shot down. Coughlin responded to this defiant gesture by sending two flying squads into the section.

One of these squads was headed by Detective William H. McCarthy, with a record in the department for being quick on the draw and a shrewd man at close quarters. Two men were detailed to accompany him in a squad automobile.

At 2 A.M. on the morning of April 6, McCarthy spotted a tall, slender man in a dark suit walking leisurely along One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street with a large package under his arm. The detective directed the driver to ease along One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street and halt at the corner of Eighty-Seventh Avenue, which was the direction in which the man with the package was moving.

The car came to a halt at the curb. McCarthy jumped out and accosted the man.

"Is this Eighty-Seventh Avenue?" the detective queried.

The man came to an abrupt stop, looked up and grinned. "I'm a stranger, old man. I don't know."

"Where do you live then?" McCarthy asked, reaching for his gun. "And what's that under your arm?"

"I live in South Brooklyn," said the man. "This under my arm is my radio set."

McCarthy drew his gun and glued his eyes on the man's free left hand.

"Well, what are you doing in this strange neighborhood at this hour?"

The man grinned and reached for the inner pocket of his coat.

"Keep that hand out of there,"

snapped McCarthy, recalling the cautioning words of the last alarm. "Come on, what you doing here?" he demanded.

The man grinned again. "Oh, heck," he laughed, "I was only taking my radio back home. I had it up to a party at a friend's house."

"Come on, what's your name?"

"Oh, I'm legitimate," the man laughed. "You all know about me. I'm Jim Toole of the gas company."

The name was familiar to McCarthy as that of a well-known Brooklyn man employed by the gas company.

"Hell, I'm O.K., and it's cold, old man. I'm in a hurry to get home." He started off.

"Hold on. Just a minute. What you got to show you're Jim Toole?"

"Papers," said the man. He reached again for the inner pocket of his coat. McCarthy lowered his gun as the man hauled out a wallet and opened it. He took out several papers and a card. He handed the card to the detective, who stepped back a pace to gain the light from a street lamp. He looked at the card and made out the name of James Toole.

"What else you got there?" the detective said, indicating the other papers in the man's hand.

"Oh, receipts and that kind of stuff."

"Let's have a look." McCarthy took the papers and again stepped back under the light. He bent over to inspect them and was shot in the neck. He dropped to the pavement, and as the man fled he opened fire, emptying his pistol. The two detectives seated in the automobile also opened fire as the machine lurched forward.

A block away the fleeing killer dropped the radio set and the wallet he had shown McCarthy, and, with the agility of a greyhound, vaulted a high board fence and vanished as he had done in each previous get-away.

The wallet was picked up by one of the detectives. Besides the Toole papers it contained two pawn tickets signed "George Albert" and two unsigned letters addressed to Frank Merriwell and William Cody. At headquarters an hour later the report filtered in that earlier on the night McCarthy was shot down the home of James Toole in South Brooklyn had been entered and a wallet and radio set stolen. The objects dropped by the killer were identified as Toole's property.

The thief, with canny resourcefulness, had stepped into Toole's shoes. It became apparent that his motive in taking wallets along with radio sets was to furnish him with identification papers which would seem genuine if he were accosted by the police and asked to show up.

McCarthy's wound was slight, and he recovered. He had got a fair look at his man and was able to add to the meager description the fact that the man had a flat face with a broad nose that seemed to have been smashed in, and brown eyes which drooped sullenly.

From Toole it was learned that he had never seen the unsigned letters or pawn tickets found in his wallet. The presumption followed that the letters were the property of the unknown killer, and that at least two of his aliases were Merriwell and Cody, both monickers frequently assumed by seasoned criminals.

Two hundred men named George Albert were found listed in the city directory and voting lists. A nice task of elimination lay ahead of the Detective Bureau.

A more important development, from the police standpoint, was the

transfer of the investigation from the general crime blotter to the Homicide Bureau. Murder had been done, and automatically it now fell to the lot of Deputy Inspector Arthur Carey, chief of the Homicide Bureau, and his staff of experienced homicide specialists, to find the slayer of Patrolman Kenny and to achieve that end before the desperate killer could again employ his murderous coat-pocket stall.

Two young men, James Pyke and William Jackson, both veterans of the World War, with splendid front line records, were attached to the Detective Bureau as third-grade detectives at the time the inquiry was placed in the hands of the Homicide Squad. Both displayed keen ingenuity and resourcefulness in cleaning up the minor jobs assigned to them. As veterans of actual combat in France, they possessed the aggressive spirit of the soldier and the sense of *camaraderie* which army life in the fighting field breeds among men. They flared with resentment against the slayer of a brother officer, and, uninvited, appeared one morning shortly after the shooting of McCarthy in Deputy Inspector Carey's office.

"Inspector," said Pyke, "will you let Jackson and I take a crack at this Radio Killer in our off time?"

Carey, one of the few remaining members of the force who were known as Byrnes's Immortals because of service under Inspector Thomas Byrnes, one of the department's most noted thief catchers, sized up the two young men. They were direct, aggressive and keen-eyed. He liked them both.

"We'll get the Radio Killer or never show up here again," Jackson put in.

Carey conferred with Coughlin, and the two third-graders were assigned to the Homicide Squad to work in their off hours on the case.

The one hopeful lead was the Toole wallet and its contents, and in particular the pawn tickets signed with the name of George Albert. The two sleuths were joined by Detective McCarthy, and the task of looking up the two hundred odd George Alberts in the greater city was undertaken. The proverbial happened. The last George Albert interviewed suggested by his conduct that there was something he wished not to say about the pawn tickets. He eagerly wrote his signature for the detectives, but it was utterly unlike the signatures affixed to the tickets.

"Albert," McCarthy asked, "who do you know that would use your name?"

Albert demurred. "Can't think of anybody," he responded, shifting nervously.

"Come down a little bit closer," McCarthy insisted. "Do you know a man about twenty-six or twenty-seven with a flat face and broad nose?"

A shake of the head indicated the man's unwillingness to directly answer the question.

"What's the matter, Albert?" McCarthy snapped. "Has a man of that description got something on you that you're afraid to talk? You know the man that signed that name of yours to those tickets."

Still Albert was noncommittal.

"Bring him along to headquarters," Pyke suggested.

The three detectives took Albert to the Bureau of Criminal Identification and there laid before him an assortment of several hundred photographs of burglars whose noses were flat or twisted. Albert looked them over and shook his head. He picked up one

photograph, looked closely at it and then dropped it as though it was tipped with nitric acid. Pyke watched the man intently.

"Does that look like him?" McCarthy asked quickly.

The man shook his head and stepped back.

"Does that photograph look like him?" McCarthy insisted.

"It looks like a man I used to see around Third Avenue and Fourteenth Street," said Albert.

McCarthy picked up the photograph and looked at it intently. He handed it to Pyke. "It looks like the man that took the pot at me," he said in a low voice.

"And that about Third Avenue and Fourteenth Street clicks with me," Pyke grinned. He turned the photograph over and read notations on the back. The man's name was Paul Emanuel Hilton. He was about twenty-six, tall, slender, and had served terms in a reformatory and several prisons.

Albert was permitted to leave. Later the reason for his reticence became apparent. He had served a term with Hilton in the Elmira, New York, Reformatory. He had "squared" and was doing his best to protect himself from the publicity that would have followed his identification of Hilton.

The casual mention by Albert of Third Avenue and Fourteenth Street sent Pyke and Jackson pell-mell to the shop of the used radio dealer in that section of the city. They were armed with Hilton's photograph. It was shown to the dealer. He shook his head.

"That bird?" he said cockily. "I've never seen him in my life." His round, red face widened into a grin.

"You know, this is a murder case now," Pyke reminded.

The dealer shrugged his shoulders. "All right," he grinned. "Murder or no murder I'm telling you I never saw that bird in my life."

Thus was summarily closed this avenue of contacting the mysterious killer. The two detectives left the shop. On their way back to headquarters they stopped to quench their thirst with an orangeade.

"Bill," said Pyke, addressing his partner, "this is April 8. Kenny is dead two days. Our man lifted a radio last night. I'm giving myself a week to round him up before he gets another one of our fellows."

"We'll turn things upside down," said Jackson. The two shook hands and walked to the edge of the sidewalk. Pyke took Hilton's photograph from his pocket and looked at the reverse side. "It looks like a job of reasoning pure and simple," he remarked. He tapped the photograph with his forefinger. "There's nothing like concentrating on one detail. That detail is on the back of this photo." Then he read aloud a notation in ink written at the end of an entry thating that Hilton had been in a protectory in 1900, two penitentiaries and the Rhode Island State prison. The notation was this:

> "This man has a habit of assuming the names of famous football players. Played ball while in Elmira Reformatory."

"That," said Pyke in a confident voice, "is the thread we'll take a start with."

"And that'll take you where?" asked Jackson.

"Into his history. We'll look this man up from the cradle to now, following the one thread—baseball. It says here on the card that he played the cornet in the Navy in 1918. That

explains his ear for music. But it's no lead. A man don't go crazy about a cornet like he does about baseball. Me, for instance. I'm bugs about baseball. And it says here, too, that he was a fast runner. Well, we know that from his get-away."

"Can you dig up his history in a week?" Jackson asked.

"We'll get it all in less time than that. What I said was I'd *catch* him before a week runs out. Baseball and Third Avenue and Fourteenth Street. Those two things belong right up in the front of our brains."

So the inquiry into Paul Emanuel Hilton's history began. Inquiries made of former inmates of Elmira Reformatory disclosed that the man was an unusually rabid baseball fan and that while he was in the institution he played third base on the reformatory team. All other information about Hilton was discarded by Pyke. He had struck the baseball thread and proposed to follow that along to the exclusion of all else. At the protectory where Hilton was confined as a boy it was learned that he once toppled over the captain of the baseball team because he was not permitted to play third base. In the Rhode Island prison he played on the team and when not assigned to third base became so refractory that he was punished. Later when he was told that only men who made high grades in their deportment and prison work would be permitted on the ball team, Hilton made one hundred per cent and won third base.

A prison turnkey told the detectives that Hilton was an unusually ambidexterous player. He could throw, catch or bat equally well with right or left hand. This ambidexterity also had served him in his criminal exploits. He had shot Kenny with his left hand, but had shot McCarthy with his right. He could reach into his inner coat pocket with either hand.

"Queer bird that Hilton," the turnkey said. "But no fool. He had one ambition in life. To be a great third baseman. Had only one dissipation, cigarettes. He told me he wasn't interested in women, liquor, coffee or pie because they interfered with his training."

A convict who played on the team with Hilton told the two sleuths that if Hilton was back on the burglary racket he would never be taken alive.

"He left here blowing that he had a special stunt for cops," said the convict.

Pyke looked at Jackson. "So we've observed," he said. "He's fooled four of our men and got one."

"Killed one, huh?" the convict exclaimed. "Then you'll never get him."

Outside the prison Jackson commented upon the fact that the history they had thus far dug up was revelant, but it did not point to Hilton's whereabouts and that the last remark of the convict was nothing to enthuse men on a fast hunt for a killer.

"Maybe so," said Pyke with a confident smile. Then he added quickly: "What do you know about baseball, Bill?"

"Less than you could get on a postage stamp," said Jackson.

"But enough to start an argument?"

"Oh, I could start an argument on anything, for a stall."

Pyke grinned. "That's enough," he said.

Two young men with a growth of stubble on their chops strolled into a dingy cellar pool room and cider stube on Third Avenue a few blocks south of Fourteenth Street on the night of Monday, April 12. The place was

known as an habitat of ex-convicts and thieves. It was not far from the store of the used radio dealer whose vehement denials of even a trading acquaintance with Hilton already had been recorded in police reports.

The two men were Pyke and Jackson and the magnet that had drawn them into the cellar rendezvous, which they had never before visited, was the deduction that if Hilton had sold sets to the used radio dealer whose store was in the vicinity it was likely that he would frequent a hideaway in that same vicinity and not ramble about the city with his flat nose on display. The pool room contained a large crowd of men among whom were ex-convicts.

The two detectives took seats at a wobbly round table and ordered cider. They sipped from their glasses and then Pyke brought his fist down hard upon the shaky table.

"You're all wet about third base," he shouted at his partner in a voice that filled the room. Two men bent over an adjoining table looked up, startled by the half angry tone of Pyke's voice and the crash with which his fist hit the table.

"Like hell I am," Jackson cried back in a still louder and angrier voice. "Third base is the biggest job on a nine, outside of pitching."

"Where do you get that stuff?" Pyke shot back. "Where do you get off to talk baseball anyway? You can't even tell me who was the greatest third baseman of the last twenty years."

"In the last twenty years?" Jackson repeated. "Mathewson," he added.

Pyke let out a bellowing laugh. "Mathewson! Wow!" he sang out. "He never played third base in his life."

"What you talking about," said Jackson. "He started at third base."

"He was never anything but a pitcher," said Pyke, glancing sidewise at the two men at the adjoining table whose eyes were still upon the detectives.

"I'll lay you ten bucks he played third base," said Jackson. He dropped a ten-dollar bill on the center of the table. Pyke dug into his trousers pocket and crossed Jackson's bill with a ten-dollar note.

"Easy money," said Pyke. He turned to the man nearest him at the next table. He winked. "Like baby food," Pyke added. "I hate to take it," he said to Jackson. He looked again at the stranger. "How about it, Jack?" he asked the man.

"What's the bet?" the stranger asked.

"Did Christy Mathewson ever play third base?" Pyke explained.

The man circled his eyes around the smoke filled room. "I don't know much about baseball," he said, "but if that guy Merriwell was around here he'd hand you the right dope in a second."

"Call him over, will you?" Pyke asked.

The stranger squinted around the room. "I don't see him around," he said. "He's been kind of scarce lately. Ran shy on his bank roll and is out making a new stake."

"He knows third base, huh?" Pyke asked.

"That's all he does know," said the man. "Hell, he thinks Heinie Groh, the Giants' third baseman, ought to be president of the United States."

"Knows Groh personally, huh?"

The stranger grinned. "If he don't he ought to. He was to every game Groh played in last season. Never missed one. Then he came back here and wrote Groh giving him pointers on

how he ought to have made this or that play at third."

"Too bad he's not around," said Pyke. He looked sharply at Jackson and smiled confidently. "We'll take in the opening game of the Giants at the Polo Grounds to-morrow," he said to his partner. "We'll settle the bet there. Take back your dough." They picked up the two bills on the table.

On a news-stand outside Pyke picked up an early morning newspaper damp from the presses. He turned to the sporting pages and came upon the disturbing news that last minute changes in the line-up for the opening game of the Giants with Brooklyn placed Lindstrom, a comparatively little known player, in the position at third base usually played by Groh.

"That's tough," said Pyke. "Groh's not booked to play. Still it don't seem possible that they'll disappoint an opening crowd by keeping Groh out."

"You figure Hilton'll be at the game?" Jackson asked.

"If Groh plays, yes. Even if there's only a chance that Groh might play he'll be there, if I know anything about how baseball grips a guy."

"You're going to look for him in a mob of forty or fifty thousand people?"

"Forty, fifty or a hundred thousand," said Pyke. "It doesn't matter. We'll take up a post at the north gate to the bleacher seats. That's where a man that's nuts about third base would go in. Hilton's broke from all accounts. He'll grab a cheap bleacher seat as close as he can to third base."

"We'll keep our eyes out for the flat, smashed-in nose," said Jackson.

"There's still a better test," grinned Pyke. "That stall of his, reaching into the inside pocket of his coat. That's a better mark than even the nose."

The opening game between the New York Giants and the Brooklyn teams of the National League was scheduled to begin at 3.30 P.M. on Tuesday, April 13. Hours before that Pyke and Jackson took up their watch at the north gate to the bleachers in the Polo Grounds.

The long queue lengthened fast and the eyes of the two detectives traveled down the row of faces, scanning them for sight of a tall, slender man with a flat nose.

"He's probably holding off on account of Groh not being in the line-up," said Pyke.

At two o'clock the band within the grounds struck up with "Will You Love Me In December As You Did In May?" This tune signalized the entry of Mayor Walker, author of the song, into the Polo Grounds. Within a few minutes the announcement traveled through the crowd that Groh would play.

"Now watch the rush," Pyke smiled. "The news that Groh'll play will travel fast. Our man'll be here."

Within twenty minutes a sudden rush of fans lengthened the queue by half a block. The two detectives left their post at the gate and walked along the line scanning each face as they went. George Chiquette, a detective assigned to pickpocket duty among the crowds, came up to Pyke.

"Jackson's here," said Pyke, "but we can't take a chance on this gent."

"Who is he?" Chiquette asked.

"The Queens Radio Killer that got Kenny," said Pyke.

"Just tell me what you want me to do," said Chiquette eagerly. Pyke told him that the moment he picked out the man he was after Chiquette should be ready at a signal to help seize the killer.

The three detectives continued on down the line.

Suddenly Pyke halted and motioned Jackson and Chiquette to him.

"Take an easy look," said Pyke in a low voice. "The third man from the end of the line."

Jackson and Chiquette glanced casually around and saw a tall, slender man with a flat nose standing in the line where Pyke had indicated. He wore a light hat and a red muffler.

"Think he's your man?" Chiquette queried.

"It 'll take less than a minute to find out," Pyke grinned. The three men started for the end of the line, separating as they went along. They watched their man as he slowly moved in the line toward the gate. They moved with the line.

When the man was within ten feet of the gate Pyke went up to him and Jackson and Chiquette closed in.

"What's your name?" Pyke queried.

The suspect lifted his drooping eyes and grinned at Pyke. "My name is Donnolly," he said, giving the name of a patrolman he had shot and wounded.

His left hand went up to the inner pocket of his coat.

"Come out of that," cried Pyke, and he caught the man's wrist. "Snatch," the young detective sang out, and Jackson and Chiquette caught his right arm.

"I'm legitimate," the man said, using the same expression that he had used when he had previously been accosted by the officers he had wounded. "I'll show you who I am," he went on, and, throwing himself back out of the line, wrenched his hand free from Pyke's grasp. The hand went up to the inner pocket of his coat and drew out an identification card with the name of John Brady on it. Pyke recognized it as the name of a Queen's resident whose home had been entered and a radio set and wallet stolen.

"You said you're name was Donnolly," said Pyke.

"That is it," said the man, and reached again for his pocket. His hand went into the pocket and Pyke saw it slowly draw out a gun. But before he could take it fully out of the pocket Pyke's big hand had coiled about the wrist that held the gun and an instant later Chiquette grabbed the gun by the stock and wrested it from him.

The man lunged into the crowd wrenching his hand free from Pyke's hold. He lifted it to his coat pocket and Pyke seized it again and, jerking it from the pocket, ripped the pocket apart. Fourteen cartridges and three pearl-handled knives fell to the sidewalk. The man made one more violent attempt to free himself from his captors, but the weight of the three detectives bearing down upon his shoulders doubled him up and he sagged to the pavement. The struggle was over.

Pyke still holding his wrist bent over the form lying prostrate on the sidewalk. "Hilton's your name," the detective said. "You killed Kenny."

Hilton's lip curled. "I killed him to get away," he snarled. "And I would have killed you with half a chance." He scowled hard at the detective. "You tricked me," he said.

Pyke grinned. "Baseball tricked you," he said.

Hilton rose suddenly to a sitting position, his arms still locked in the grip of Jackson's and Chiquette's hands. "Baseball tricked me, huh?" he muttered. "It's the only thing I ever cared for in all my life."

"So we've observed," Pyke remarked.

At headquarters Hilton was put into the Homicide Bureau car and taken to Queens by Deputy Inspector Carey. He pointed out twenty-nine homes that he

could recall having robbed and then indicated as best he could where he had shot the five officers.

"I'd tell you their names," he said to Carey, "but I don't know them."

"You read their names in the newspapers, didn't you?" Carey asked.

"I only read newspapers in the baseball season. Then I only looked at the sporting pages and the comics," said Hilton.

"Where did you get your fondness for radio?" the deputy inspector asked.

"I got a pretty good ear for music from playing the cornet in the Navy," said Hilton. "And I knew that the best machines for radio were the homemade ones. A fence told me that."

He named the fence. It was the same used radio dealer who had previously denied knowledge of Hilton. He had sold the man more than ten of the stolen outfits. The dealer was arrested for receiving stolen property.

Hilton's modus operandi had puzzled Carey as it had puzzled Coughlin, so to clear up this phase of his activities the deputy inspector asked him how he sized up the worth-while outfits.

"Well," said Hilton, "everybody in Queens was building radio sets. One day I'd go out scouting in the evening and walk along listening to the sets. It was easy to stand on the sidewalk outside these single houses and get an earful and then mark the houses with the good sets in them. Then when you fellows got hot after me I didn't have to go scouting. I had a couple of hundred good sets located that I had already scouted."

"How did you tell the good sets from the cheap ones?" he was asked.

"There was no squeak to their music," Hilton replied. "It came out clear and sharp like the high note in a cornet with a nice trill. Then, of course, there were always a lot of radio fans carrying their sets back and forth from one house to another. They thought a lot of their sets."

"What did you take the wallets for?"

"Those," he grinned. "They had the papers in them that I could flash when a cop picked me up and I needed identification. If a cop looked too long at them or began to ask too many questions, well, I pulled the gun."

Hilton was tried for killing Patrolman Kenny and convicted of murder in the first degree.

In the death house at Sing Sing prison his interest seemed to be fixed wholly upon the fate of the fence who had purchased his loot.

"They called me the radio burglar and the killer," he said a few days before execution. "Well, I shot to get away. The real burglar was the fence who took the stuff from me. For the two-hundred-dollar sets I turned over to him he gave me four and six dollars a piece. He kept the price down so I'd go out and get more. I hope they get that guy."

The day after Hilton's execution the fence pleaded guilty to receiving stolen property.

Chiquette, Pyke and Jackson were rewarded by promotion to first grade detectives, which meant a six-hundred-dollar increase in salary for each. They earned the reward. Pyke, perhaps more than the others, earned it, for he succeeded in getting his man in less than the week, as he had promised. His deductions turned the trick. Yet he lost something.

"You know," he remarked, "I played ball in the sandlots. For years I went to every game, big or little. I never go any more. You know how it is—memories."

The Trackless Trail

When a Murderer Fails to Leave Footprints on a Dusty Cellar Floor, Tug Norton Must Use His Second-Sight

By Edward Parrish Ware

IF all the fools on earth were to die at one and the same time, the next world-census could be taken on a cigarette paper.

There is the out-and-out fool, comprising the chief population of Goofville. They dwell in padded cells. Next comes the half-wise fool. He has just enough sense to know he is a fool, but not enough sense to stop being one. That type embraces the majority of us. Then comes the fancy fool. Webster does not define him, so I'll do it for you in a line or two.

The fancy fool might be called the super-fool. He's not content to run with the pack, but must essay something more flattering to his ego. He carries his foolishness to a superlative degree—and generally may be found in the ranks of crookdom.

The fancy fool I'm going to tell you about was a crook. He worked as slick a little game as I have ever come across. Had he been one of the ordinary species he might have got away with it. But, being one of the fancy kind and possessed of the highly developed imaginative qualities of his type, he blundered.

Had he been satisfied with mere theft, instead of adding murder to it —but he wasn't. So why speculate?

Business being a trifle dull in the offices of the Kaw Valley Detective Bureau, of which I, Tug Norton, am

"Don't hesitate to shoot the devil," I whispered

founder, owner and chief operative, I was resting my feet on my desk top and reflecting upon the unaccountable conduct of mankind in general, when Spec announced a caller.

"Mr. Stover wants to see you, boss."

Curt Stover was, and still is, a county detective from over on the Kansas side. A smart chap who would be a knockout in his line if he were not a trifle shy on confidence in himself. He'll get over that lack some day; then the crooks in his bailiwick would do well to clear out.

Curt came in.

"Reckon you ain't interested enough in what happens to us Kansans," he hazarded, sitting down and lighting a smoke, "to have any knowledge of the matter that brings me to you. It's a puzzler, Tug."

"Yeah? Somebody catch you asleep, and take you for your rod and badge?"

"Might as well have," he replied, not even grinning. "I'll get my rod and badge taken from me, right enough, if I can't produce something real smart—and do it quick. If you ain't too busy—"

"I'm working night and day, trying to find something to do," I cut in. "Spill your tale of horror, Curt, and let's see just how bad it really is."

"You read anything about the murder—at least, supposed murder—of Warden Buxton's son?" Curt queried, adding: "Found dead in the basement of the old Tarrant mansion, up on the Kaw. Young Carl Buxton, you know. It's that matter that now has my goat tied by his whiskers."

"Sure I've read about it," I told him. "So that's been checked up to you? And the warden is right on your heels, of course. He will be, too, until you get results. I know him. Well, what about it?"

"Search me," Curt invited sourly. "I'd give a lot to know 'what about it.' Here's what I do know: Day before yesterday morning, some kids that were fishing on the Kaw near the old Tarrant place decided to explore the

house. It has a reputation of being haunted, you know, and that tempted the youngsters. Well, they explored and got all the thrills they were looking for—and then some.

"In the northwest section of the basement, a dark and musty hole it is, they came upon the body of a young and well dressed man. He had been shot through the chest. That's all they saw. Just the dead man on the floor of the basement, and a great splotch of dried blood on the front of his shirt. Then they beat it.

"I went out immediately, and as immediately recognized the son of the warden of the State prison. Knew Carl by sight. And right there in that basement, Tug, I found as queer a problem as I've ever run across.

"Carl Buxton, twenty-four years old, respected, well placed in life, was lying dead in the basement of that long deserted house, and no way on earth of accounting for his being there, or even approaching a solution of what had happened—except, of course, that he had been shot to death.

"There he laid, flat on his back, dead eyes fixed upon the cobwebby beams above him, and no gun anywhere to be found. That means, of course, that he was murdered. But, Tug, except for the tracks of the young man himself, those of the two kids who found him, and the ones I made, the dust-covered floor of the room from which the basement door opens was absolutely unmarked. The windows of the basement, what few there is, were all nailed down good and solid. They had not been opened for years. A thorough sounding of the walls, and a careful examination of the floor of the basement, makes it certain that no one could have entered it except through the doorway used for the purpose.

"Yet a man had been killed in that place within a couple of days past, and the killer had done his work without leaving any trace but the victim he left behind.

"Shot through a hole or a crack from the outside? That occurred to me, naturally. But that's blowed up, too. No holes or cracks. The killer was in the basement with young Buxton, regardless of the absence of tracks, and that's all there is to it.

"Buxton, so far as can be learned, had no enemies. He wasn't a very wild lad, either, and it's a complete mystery, his being in the place at all. Warden Buxton states that his son, who was, by the way, lately graduated from medical college, left Lansing on the eve of the night we have reason to think his death occurred. He announced that he was going for a drive in his car, that being almost a daily habit with him since he became attached to the medical staff of the prison hospital. He drove off alone in his roadster about seven o'clock in the evening. When he failed to return by morning, Warden Buxton quietly instituted a search. Later on he reported the disappearance to the police, asking them to keep matters as quiet as possible. The police failed to help any.

"After the finding of the body, a search of the grounds about the Tarrant place disclosed the car hidden in a lot of shrubbery. Nothing in it to give us a clew. No signs that he had a companion when he arrived. And that, Tug, is all there is to it."

"Robbery?"

"No. Carl had about thirty dollars on him, and his watch and ring. He also carried a thirty-eight automatic. All those things were found on his person. Besides, if robbery had been the motive would not the thieves have

taken the car also? It was a nearly new one and of good make."

"The same might apply to the killer, robbery or not," I pointed out. "Why didn't the killer remove the car? Any evidence of another car having been in the grounds lately?"

"None. No car, except Buxton's has been on the driveway from the road to the house, a matter of a quarter of a mile, since the last rain. That is sure."

"Have you queried Buxton's known associates?" I asked.

"He had only a very few," Curt replied, "and none of them know anything. It's just one of them things, Tug—"

"There ain't any of 'them things,' Curt," I grinned. "There's always an explanation. This case, like all others, has its vulnerable spot. Get that fact fixed in your mind, old-timer."

"Then for Pete's sake give me a lift on it!" Curt exclaimed, the lines of harassment deepening in his face. "Warden Buxton's got me sweating blood!"

Why not? I had nothing very important on hand at the moment, and Curt was a good lad. Besides, the case had certain features that appealed to me.

"I'll go you," I agreed. "And the first move will be to take a look at that murder basement. Let's go."

II

CURT had his car, and we set out at once for the Tarrant place, which constituted rather a large estate on the Kaw River about twenty miles from the city. It could be reached by the State highway to within a quarter of a mile, then a private road ran out to it. The property had belonged to Horace Tarrant, then dead, and was yet a valuable one. It had, however, been unoccupied for several years and had suffered the decay and dilapidation consequent to long disuse.

The house, sitting upon a prominence from which the river could be seen through the foliage of giant elms, contained about twenty rooms and was three stories high. A couple of constables guarded it, and reported that nothing disturbing had occurred during the previous night and up to that hour of the day.

"Everything quiet and ghostly," one told us. "And, believe it or not, it was that way the night Buxton was killed. Quiet and—ghostly. For if ghosts didn't do that killing, then there wasn't any killing. And that's all there is to it!"

His fellow guard solemnly agreed.

"I ain't never put any confidence in ghosts until now," he asserted. "But a feller has got to believe evidence, and all the evidence shorely points away from a human agency. That's my idea about it."

We entered the house, proceeded to a large room connecting with the kitchen and into which the basement door opened.

"There's surely an outside entrance, Curt," I suggested. "What about it?"

"Padlocked, inside and out," Curt assured me. "Locks haven't been opened for years. Nothing doing there, Tug. Access would be fairly easy by way of this floor, of course—but there were no other tracks. Get away from that, will you?"

"Sure I will. It wasn't suicide, and nobody could have shot him from outdoors. Had to be right there in the basement with his victim. Yet there are no signs of his presence, and it seems impossible that he could have removed such signs, had he made them.

Peculiar, I'll grant. Yet there is an explanation. Bet your next year's salary on that, Curt."

"Unless I can solve this puzzler," Curt mourned, as we descended the dark, smelly stairway. "there ain't going to be any next year's salary!"

The basement, a dark and musty excavation which extended under the full structure, had been laid off in compartments. In the northwest corner was the room with which we were concerned. It had once been a wine-cellar, and many old barrels, now fallen into staves, were yet there. The floor was of cement, and the walls of oblong cement blocks. One window lighted the room, and it had patently not been opened for years. I soon assured myself that all other windows of the basement were in a like state. The outer door, too, had not lately been lifted. Moreover, there were no trapdoors or other apertures in the floor above.

Yet a man had been shot down on the floor of the basement, three nights before. He had been murdered.

I went over the basement with care, but discovered nothing in the way of a secret entrance to it. An inspection of the outside foundation wall convinced me that there could be no such hidden entrance. I then had Curt point out the exact spot upon which Buxton's body had been found.

"Right here, about ten feet from the north wall," he explained. "His feet toward the wall, and his head there where I have drawn a chalk mark. You will notice that, being in such a position, he could hardly have been shot from the window, granting the window had been open."

I saw that easily. The dry cement floor would have retained no tracks, had there been any besides those of the boys and of Curt. That also was clear.

"But there is a trail, Curt, which leads into this room and out again," I insisted. "The trail of a killer. It is as surely existent as if it marked a course down the stairs and across the floor. It is invisible, yet it exists. Knowing that it does exist, we must materialize it. Reconstruct it and render it visible to the eye. That's our job."

"Yeah," Curt agreed. "But how?"

"Well, for a starter," I told him, "it's clear that Buxton had a reason for coming out here in the night, and for entering this very room and for standing on the identical spot upon which he was struck down. He came willingly, as we know. Nobody with him. At least, nobody who made tracks. Now, Curt, if we can learn why Buxton came here, we'll be a long way toward establishing that invisible trail so the human eye can scan it.

"Was it a rendezvous? A girl in the case, for instance? Maybe. These young bozos don't tell their dads everything, you know. Could he have had a date out here, and met a rival instead of the girl? That would make the case very ordinary—except for the manner in which the killing was done.

"One thing against such a theory, though," I went on to point out. "He came to this far removed corner of the basement, and certainly he could not have expected to meet a girl in such a place. That seems to blow up the girl theory.

"But he had a very definite reason for coming, girl or no girl. What was it? A man who meant to bump himself off could not have chosen a likelier spot. But he didn't kill himself. We don't seem to be getting very far along that line of reasoning, Curt, but maybe we are. At least we are doing a little figuring and a bit of eliminating.

"Mark this down: When we find out what brought Buxton here, we'll not have far to go to lay hands on the killer. And that's that."

"Maybe so," Curt assented half heartedly. "Don't quite see it, though. The killing may have been unconnected with the reason which brought Buxton here. What then? And what about the lack of tracks?"

"I'll bet what you will that the reason and the deed are closely connected," I offered. "And as for the lack of tracks—well, there are tracks that are physical, and there are tracks that cannot be seen. You don't always find tracks on the ground, Curt. Sometimes they are to be seen in the construction of a will, the wording of a letter, or the thousand and one other avenues of human contact. This won't be the only trackless trail which has been followed, you know, and the tracks dug out and laid down right where the same ought to be. Now," I finished, "I'll just have a look at this north wall. It was that wall toward which Buxton was turned, we have reason to believe, when the bullet reached him. Maybe we can learn something there."

Nothing gained there. The cement blocks were all the same, having been cast in like molds and no one differing from its neighbors. Tapped, they gave out hollow sounds. That was the trouble. Each one resounded hollowly. That was due, of course, to the nature of their construction. I gave the wall up.

"Who the deuce owns this place?" I asked. "Maybe there's something in the background that will put us on the trail."

"The records show that a man named Milton—George W. Milton—bought it from Horace Tarrant, son and heir of the original owner, about three years back," Curt informed me. "Young Tarrant sold the place almost as soon as he heired it. Too big for him, a bachelor. This Milton bought it. He lives, I gathered from the tax collector, in Litchfield, Illinois."

"Has he ever occupied the house?"

"No. Never even been here, so far as I can learn. Must have bought the place for a speculation."

"Bought it for a speculation, then lets it go the way of all unoccupied houses," I commented. "Not much speculation there. Still, moneyed men sometimes do things that are not understandable. Tarrant—Horace Tarrant. Lawyer, wasn't he? The elder, I mean."

"Yeah. Noted throughout Kansas as the best criminal lawyer in the State. Died about three years ago."

"Where does the son hang out?"

"Down the river nearer the city," Curt informed me. "The old man had several places along the Kaw, and the small one at Long Point was selected by the son for a sort of bachelor residence."

"What does he follow for a living?"

"Nothing. He heired quite a lot of money. But why the questions? What we want to do is lay them invisible tracks down where the naked eye can see them," Curt ended aggrievedly.

But I was doing some thinking. This whole case had the smell of prisons. Buxton was a physician attached to the staff at Lansing. Tarrant, the builder of the mansion, had been a lawyer closely associated with criminals. Was there a connection there?

"This Buxton lad had a reason for coming here—"

"You said that two or three times already—"

"Yeah. And I repeat it. He came to this room for a purpose, and we've got to find out what it was. Where are the things you took out of his pockets?"

"All locked up in my office in town," Curt replied. "Not a thing of importance—"

"Let me judge of that!" I snapped. The case was puzzling to the point of irritation. "Let's hie us to your hangout and take a look. And lively!"

III

WE returned to the car and headed toward the highway. Just as we left the grounds, a big open touring car drew up. It was occupied by half a dozen young people. Three men and three girls. The tall, red-faced chap at the wheel called a greeting to Curt.

"Hello, Stover!" he cried. "Any news?"

"None, Mr. Tarrant," was the reply. "We seem to be at a standstill for the moment."

"Too bad," the young fellow commiserated. "These sensation-hunting people, guests down at my place, insisted on viewing the scene of the mysterious crime. So I brought them along."

"Sorry," I cut in, "but no one can be allowed to enter the house. An outside view will have to do you."

"Yes? And who are you, if you please?"

Young Tarrant asked the question, his manner coolly condescending.

"Just another cop," I told him. "But, all the same, you and your party will have to stay outside. That right, Stover?"

"Sorry, Mr. Tarrant, but we can't allow anybody inside just now," Curt backed me up.

"All right. Just a fool notion of my friend's anyhow. So long."

"What was the big idea, Tug?" Curt asked when the car had turned away.

"Just a hunch, maybe," I replied. "Anyhow, it's not a cinch that we are through with that cellar yet. In the meantime, it's better to keep everybody out."

"You're the doctor," Curt conceded.

There was nothing particularly interesting among the things Buxton had carried the night of the murder. Just what might have been found in the pockets of any chap of his calling—except, perhaps, the automatic. It had not been recently fired, and all cartridges were accounted for.

There was one thing, however, which caught my attention again and again. More because it seemed to have no meaning, than because of any obvious significance. Just a strip of paper upon which a few figures and letters had been penciled.

This is what had been jotted upon the slip:

Nw. Cor. 10 E. 4 D.

Absolutely meaningless. I turned the slip over, noting that it had been part of a chart such as is kept by nurses in hospitals for individual patients under their care. It was blank, save for the bit of printing of a form nature.

But the thing interested me. Slipping it into my pocket, I gave my mind to thought. At the end of five minutes, I had run a course of reasoning something like this:

Under what circumstances did Buxton come by that slip of paper? While visiting patients in the medical ward of the penitentiary, most likely. There the chart blanks would be handy for

him, should he wish to make a note of something. But why make a note, other than data concerning a patient, while in the wards?

The answer to that would seem to be that he had made a minute of something either a nurse or a patient had told him. But what? The letters and figures certainly could have no connection with any medical data. That seemed certain.

Then, all of a sudden, I got an idea.

"Back to the Tarrant place, Curt!" I exclaimed. "And step on it!"

We returned at full speed, Curt puzzled, but willing enough to obey orders. We had worked together before.

"Anybody try to rush you fellows?" I asked the constable at the front door.

"Not a soul," he replied wonderingly. "What would anybody want to do that for?"

But I had no time for an answer. Leading the way to the northwest room of the basement, I paused in front of the north wall.

"Who did you think might have tried to get in, Tug?" Curt asked.

"Tarrant and his crowd, maybe," I replied shortly. "Now let me alone!"

"Nw. That is northwest," I went on aloud, consulting the penciled slip. "Cor. That is obviously corner. All right. Begin at the northwest corner. Now where do we go? 10 E. Ten east. Then what? Hell, ten cement blocks, of course!"

Rapidly I counted ten blocks east from the northwest corner of the room, then paused.

"4 D. That can only mean four blocks down—and we have it!" I exclaimed exultantly, laying a hand on the fourth cement block from the top. "Curt, stand to one side," I ordered, "though I think there is no danger now!"

Curt, his eyes big with question, stood back, and I fingered the fourth block carefully. Presently I gave it a strong pull—and the hollow block swung out on a pair of hinges!

"Look!" I exclaimed—and then the block snapped out of my hand and into place again. A strong spring had done the trick. And, significantly enough, the spring was brand new. At least, not more than a year or two old.

"What the—"

I cut in on Curt's exclamation, which, I suspect, would have been somewhat profane.

Pulling the block out again, I pointed to what lay behind it.

"There's your killer, Curt," I said. "But I reckon there won't be a pinch quite yet."

The mechanism inside was quite simple. Just a forty-one Colt revolver set in a frame, muzzle directed straight outward, trigger secured by a wire which guaranteed a discharge of the piece when the block was removed. Just as simple as that!

"Well, I will be damned!" Curt exclaimed, peering into the cavity the displaced block had disclosed. "What is it, anyhow?"

"A death-trap—and, incidentally, one of the missing tracks of this heretofore trackless trail. How tall was Buxton?"

"About five feet nine."

"Which would line him up with the muzzle of this gun just about in the region of the heart," I pointed out. "See it? He stood in front of this block, the natural position, and pulled out on it. The gun was instantly discharged, the bullet entering his chest. He staggered back, and the released block snapped into place, thereby hiding the method of dealing death. Simple as A B C."

"But who framed him, and why?"

"It's no cinch that he was framed," I reminded. "This trap may not have been set for him. In fact, I'm beginning to believe that it wasn't intended for him at all."

"But it's murder, just the same!" snapped Stover grimly.

"Absolutely."

"Any idea who set the thing?"

"A very hazy one. Look at that spring," I requested. "It was placed inside within the year, else before then and later oiled at intervals. It looks new. These cement blocks hold dampness, yet there is very little rust on the spring. Take a look at the gun, Curt—but don't take it out. Get the number, while I hold my flash."

Curt noted down the serial number, and then we examined the opening back of the weapon. It was empty.

"But it once held something," Curt offered. "Something that Buxton was after, but didn't get. That's a cinch!"

"It is. Buxton didn't get it, of course. In the first place, he would not have had time before the discharge. In the next place, there was probably nothing there when he came."

Curt gave me a look of astonishment.

"You mean to say that this gun was only guarding an empty hole?" he demanded incredulously.

"I'm thinking it was," I assured him. "Look closely at the soil in the bottom," I suggested. "What do you see there?"

"Looks like a fine spray of dark oil," he said after a glance.

"Yeah. The oiled spring and the oiled gun—you can see for yourself that the gun, too, was oiled against dampness at intervals—would account for that. But, had there been anything lying in the hole, it, instead of the soil at the bottom, would have received the oil drippings. Yeah. I'm persuaded that whatever the cache contained had been removed before the death-trap was set. Maybe I'm wrong, but I think not."

We ascertained, without disturbing the gun, that it had recently been discharged, thus confirming the method used in young Buxton's killing. Curt had already informed me that the death bullet was of forty-one caliber.

"What about finger-marks on this outfit?" he queried. "We ought to look for them."

"Look, Curt, but you can bet you won't find any. The clever chap who thought up this was too clever by far to leave such amateurish things as finger-prints behind him. Tell you what would be better to do. Try and trace this gun. Find out who bought it, if that's possible. I think, however, you will come up against a blank wall there too. But you might have a try."

"And you?"

"Me for the hospital ward at Lansing," I told him. "We'll meet at your office later, if I don't phone you different. In the meantime, send one of your men down here. Give him orders to shoot rather than permit anybody, no matter who, to enter this room without orders from you or me. Get at it, and I'll be off to Lansing."

IV

I LEFT it with Curt, and set out for the State prison at once.

"Want to visit your hospital," I told the deputy warden, Nelms, who was known to me. "I'm on the Buxton case. Just send instructions to the head nurse to show me through."

Nelms himself accompanied me to the hospital annex and introduced me to Miss Carrol, nurse in charge. She was a pretty, agreeable young woman, and I saw at a glance that her head

was level. Therefore I took her into my confidence the moment we were alone.

"I have reason to believe that Dr. Buxton had a conversation with one of the patients here, some few days ago, and that the conversation had a very distinct bearing upon his death," I explained. "It is likely that we shall have some difficulty in finding the patient in question, since the matter is one he will not willingly discuss. Do you know, Miss Carrol, of any patient to whom Buxton seemed to be more than ordinarily attentive?"

"I recall no one, Mr. Norton," Miss Carrol assured me. "Dr. Buxton was very humane, and gave generously of his time and attention to the patients. Shall we go through the wards?"

"Not just yet. Doing so would accomplish nothing, unless we can fix upon some certain person with whom Dr. Buxton— By the way, do you recall seeing Dr. Buxton taking down with pencil and paper anything communicated to him by a patient? Within the past week or so, I'd say. Just jotting down something a patient was telling him?"

"No," Miss Carrol replied after a brief hesitation. "I'm sure I don't. But it may be that another nurse, or perhaps an orderly, may have noticed something of the sort. We can easily inquire. Shall we?"

"There's something else that may help," I told her. "Dr. Buxton wrote a few letters and figures on a slip of paper which was torn from a record chart in a ward of the hospital. It was probably lying on a table beside the bed of the patient in question—"

"Then that makes it easy, Mr. Norton!" Miss Carrol broke in happily. "The record charts are all on file in my office, and nothing easier than to run them through. Come with me."

We entered Miss Carrol's office and she placed a file upon her desk. Within five minutes we had a chart before us which seemed to be the one we sought. A narrow strip had been torn from the bottom. Fishing out the penciled fragment, which I had in my pocket, I promptly established the fact that it was indeed the chart sought.

"Now," I said, rising, "we have only to talk with this patient—No. 334621—and extract the information desired. Fine!"

Miss Carrol's brow puckered, and she looked at me regretfully.

"It's just too bad, Mr. Norton!" she declared. "But No. 334621 died four days ago."

"Hell!" I ejaculated under my breath. "Then I'm blowed up," I told the pretty nurse. "It's certain that No. 334621 could have cleared up a lot of mystery, had I been able to question him. Wait, though!" I exclaimed. "Maybe all isn't lost after all! What age was this 334621?"

"Sixty years," was the reply.

"Can you get me his papers, Miss Carrol?"

An orderly brought the papers from the record room, and I swiftly examined them. And in those papers I found some more of those "tracks" about which I had lectured Curt.

"Robert Bilbro. Committed eight years ago. Convicted of wrecking the Night and Day Bank in Kansas City, Kansas. Humph! I remember Bilbro well. Lots of fuss and feathers over the wrecking of that bank—and, by gollies! Horace Tarrant was his attorney! Well, well, Miss Carrol, we've got over the obstacle of Bilbro's death after all!"

"Oh! Then you've learned from the papers all that you hoped to hear from Bilbro?" she asked.

"More than I could have forced out of him, quite likely," I replied. "Thank you very much."

Ten minutes later I was racing back toward Kansas City. My first move after reaching the office was to send a telegram to the chief of police at Litchfield, Illinois. His reply was corroborative of what I had begun to suspect.

George W. Milton was not known there. If he had resided in the town, he kept it very quiet.

Then followed a visit to the photographers in Kansas City, Kansas, where I succeeded in obtaining a certain picture I wanted. That picture went forward to the postmaster at Litchfield, and then I got busy on something else.

In searching the records in connection with the trial and conviction of Robert Bilbro for wrecking the Night and Day Bank I came across further tracks. This set in particular:

Bilbro had disposed of one hundred thousand dollars' worth of personal property, the existence of which had not been generally known. That was just before the crash. After the crash, all efforts to find that hundred thousand proved unavailing, and Bilbro merely laughed when questioned about it.

"He's got that money hid out!" the chief of detectives exclaimed. "Expects to live easy after his stretch is done! Crooked? I'll say it is!"

And there the matter rested. Bilbro went to prison for ten years, and he went without divulging the whereabouts of the money. But, thanks to the discovery of that cache in the basement of Tarrant's house, its hiding place was no longer a mystery.

Even so, what good would result from its discovery? None, as matters then stood. Evidently, Bilbro, near death, had divulged the secret to Dr. Buxton, and Buxton had gone to get the money. He got a slug of lead instead.

V

BUT the case was not ended yet. I had some hot ideas in this matter, and meant to try 'em out pronto.

The following day I paid Curt a visit at the Tarrant place where he was on watch.

"Tell your constables to beat it," I instructed. "Let it be known that the murder of Buxton has completely baffled you. You are leaving for Canada to run out the only clew, a slim one at that, you haven't already had blow up on you. Let the papers get that strong. Tell the newshounds that Mr. Norton, of the Kaw Valley Detective Bureau, called into the case, is of the opinion the murder was not committed on the Tarrant property at all. Young Buxton was slain elsewhere, and his body later hidden in the basement. But that is as far as Mr. Norton would commit himself. It is your belief, tell the reporters, that the said Mr. Norton is completely treed. Got all that?"

"Yeah!" Curt snapped. "But, hell! What does it all mean?"

"It means that we should very soon snap the cuffs on the bozo we are after. Here's the lay, Curt: Bilbro persuaded Tarrant, his attorney and lifelong friend, to secrete one hundred thousand dollars in that cache in the basement. It wouldn't do for Tarrant to bank the money in his own name, because it would then become a part of his estate in the event of his death. The money must be where it would be available to Bilbro, upon his release,

whether or not Tarrant still lived. So they cached it in that hole, back of the cement block. Somebody got wise, though, plundered the cache—"

"How do you know Tarrant himself didn't take the jack?" Curt broke in.

"Because Tarrant wouldn't do it, for one reason. Another, who is oiling that gun in the cache so regularly? Tarrant, you know, has been dead for three years, yet the gun is kept oiled and ready. Furthermore, why would Tarrant have wanted to leave such a trap for Bilbro? The bird who got the money figured to kill Bilbro, should he come for it."

"And you figure to get him here?"

"I do. Come to the basement, while I do a bit of fixing down there."

Curt and I went down and opened the cache. My next move puzzled Curt greatly until I explained. Taking a cartridge, forty-one caliber, from a pocket, I inserted it in the gun beneath the hammer, cocked the weapon, made sure the mechanism was in working shape, then closed it up.

For the next three days we slept in daylight and watched at night. When the fourth night passed without developments, Curt began to get discouraged, and I'll confess that I got a bit shaky myself.

Then, on the fifth night, about twelve o'clock, things broke. We were sitting on a side porch near the basement door.

"*S-s-h-h-h-h!*"

Curt accompanied his warning with a grip on my arm.

"Motor boat. Been hearing it for several minutes. Now it's shut off, and if my ears aren't fooling me it came to anchor at the wharf just below," he explained. "Maybe we'd better get under cover."

We promptly sought the basement, hiding ourselves in the darkness back of the furnace. Five minutes later a soft tread on the floor above warned us that some one was coming.

Footsteps, careful ones, then caused the basement stairs to creak, and presently the door at the bottom of the flight was opened cautiously. A thin beam of yellow light shot athwart the darkness.

"Get ready with your flash!" I whispered to Curt. "And don't hesitate to shoot that devil if he don't kick in pronto!"

Silence for a moment. Then we heard slow footsteps crossing the floor, and again a thin beam of light appeared. It moved forward, and the holder of the flash followed it into the room at the northwest corner. We crept noiselessly after.

Pausing just without the door, we waited. Something scratched on the foundation, and again the beam of yellow light. It traveled slowly along the wall from the southwest corner, reached a spot near the ceiling about twelve feet distant, then slanted downward and became fixed on the fourth cement block from the top.

"Get set!" Curt whispered.

The next instant a deafening explosion rattled the windows of the cellar, reverberating terrifically in the small chamber. A flash of yellow flame seemed to leap from a spot in the north wall, and the scent of exploded powder was instantly in evidence.

Above the noise of the explosion a human voice rang high and shrill. It was a wail of terror.

"Now!"

Curt's flash light cut through the darkness and fixed upon the figure of a man near the north wall. He was shrinking back from it, hands raised

as though to protect his face. A deathly white face, out of which a pair of terror-stricken eyes glistened in the light.

"Up with 'em, Tarrant!" I ordered, leaping across the floor and jamming a gun against his ribs. "Quick, or I'll fill your hide with lead!"

Horace Tarrant stood speechless, hands shakily held in the air.

"Bu—but I, why I don't understand!" Tarrant stammered, looking wildly from Curt to me, from me to Curt. "What's the meaning of all this?"

"Oh, you're all sound," I assured him. "I was thoughtful enough to remove the lead from the cartridge before I loaded the trap-gun. You're saved—for the chair."

"You're talking nonsense!" Tarrant cried—but there was something in his voice and bearing that advertised his hopeless inner state. The game was up and he was caught dead to rights.

"Sit down on one of those barrels," I ordered. "Let me tell you, first, that you're under arrest for the murder of Dr. Carl Buxton. The crime was committed here in this room, and you, while not even on the premises at the moment, did the killing.

"Your father wised you to this cache when he knew he was going to die. He depended upon your honor in the matter—and you haven't got any. You took the money Bilbro had hidden, and you framed the gun so Bilbro, should he be released and come here, would be slain. You were afraid he would get you, should he discover the loss and have a chance to. He'd know right off the reel who the thief was. So you fixed for him.

"Then, realizing that the finding of a dead man in your basement would cause a lot of unpleasant talk, if nothing else, you faked a sale of this property and moved away. Sold to yourself, in fine. Your picture has been identified by the postmaster at Litchfield as one George W. Milton, who mailed letters from there and occasionally got mail at Litchfield.

"All your actions have betrayed the nature of a coward, and the possession of a vivid imagination. Imagination caused you to fear what Bilbro might do upon his release. Imagination rode you in the matter of a possible slip should you keep the place and Bilbro be later found dead in the basement. Imagination, then, might trap you in the end.

"How? This way: You'd never rest satisfied so long as that gun trap remained in existence. Somebody might discover it accidentally, and you might be connected with it. You would seek to destroy it. We counted on that.

"All right. Suppose you did come? Well, if you should be met, when you swung the block out, with a blast in the face and a roar in your ears, your imagination would simply run riot. You'd never understand how the gun could fire again, seeing you had put only one shell into it, and you'd be so high up in the air, so desperately frightened, you'd lose what little nerve you had. And it all worked out that way. You did come—"

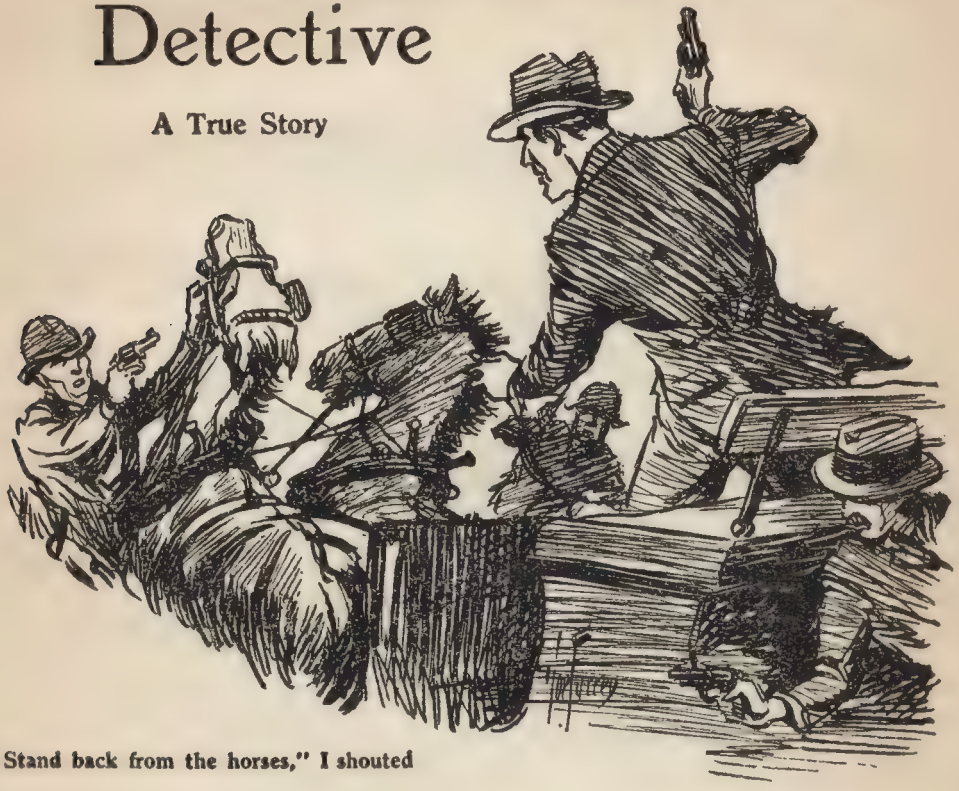
"For God's sake let up!" Tarrant was groveling brokenly, eyes wild with fright. "You know it all! All, except that I had no intention of harming anybody but Bilbro. I never thought anybody else would open that cache! I didn't mean to kill Buxton!"

Hanging not being legal in Kansas, Horace Tarrant got life—and is now serving it under the wardenship of the father of the man he killed.

Darned if I'd like that!

Manhunts of a Great Detective

A True Story



"Stand back from the horses," I shouted

The Strange Case in the Village of Slabtown, Where a Man Would Trade His Wife for a Couple of Dollars and a Cow

By John Wilson Murray and Victor Speer

Each chapter is a separate adventure in Murray's career. Begin anywhere.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Baldy Drinkwater

DRINKWATER'S first name was Archibald. His friends called him Baldy Drinkwater. He was a traveling nursery man, and he drove from county to county doing business with farmers. He had a wide acquaintance. His specialty was selling trees and fancy shrubbery. He was persistent, and clung to the guileless farmer until he had him for a customer. Cash or notes, it was all the same to Baldy Drinkwater. In fact, he seemed to prefer notes from many of his customers.

"He finally began to discount notes in the banks, and eventually he disappeared," said Murray. "When the signatures were investigated it was found that Baldy Drinkwater was a forger, and had faked the signatures to bogus orders and to notes. The farmers were angry, and it was just as well for Baldy that he was out of the country. The case came to me, and I set out to find him.

"He had a brother-in-law in Illinois, and it was quite probable Baldy had skipped to him. Refugees frequently flee to relatives in other countries, instead of braving exile alone or apart from any one who knew them before. I billed Baldy all over the country, too. While I was waiting for trace of him I prepared the necessary extradition papers, and when no clew to his whereabouts developed I started for Chicago. There I called on the United States Commissioner and the Marshal, and he assigned a German deputy to assist me. The deputy and I went by train to the village of St. Ann's, about one hundred and fifty miles from Chicago. Baldy's brother-in-law lived near St. Ann's.

"The German deputy was a funny fellow. He spoke quaint English, and was full of proverbs. Also he had a love affair, which demanded much of his thought, and of which he spoke frequently and fervidly. I remember we were riding serenely along, and the train passed a house painted sea-green. My German friend grasped my arm and shook me out of a pleasant doze, and pointed excitedly out the window.

"'See it! See it!' he cried.

"'That house? What about it?' I asked, wondering if Baldy Drinkwater's face had appeared at the window.

"'Her eyes are yust t'at color,' he exclaimed, and sank back with a happy sigh.

"'The color of the house?' I said, craning my neck for another glimpse of the sea-green farmhouse.

"'Yah,' he said sweetly. 'Heafenly blue!'

"A lot of things along the road reminded him of her. He was not backward to tell me of them.

"'Say, Peter,' said I finally. 'Does she ever cry?'

"'Vunce,' said Peter sadly.

"'What did you do?' I asked.

"'I yust let her cry till she dried herself up,' said he.

"'Don't you know that the books tell of how the fond lover kisses the tears away?' I asked.

"I remember Peter's expression to this day. His face puckered up.

"'Ah, yah!' he said. 'I yust tried it, und it was salty like t'e mackerel—*o-o-oof!*' and Peter spat mightily at the mere memory of it. 'She iss very salty, iss Katrina.'

"But he turned out to be a brave man, did Peter. We arrived at St. Ann's about six o'clock, and I had no trouble in learning that Baldy's

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Editor's Note:—A year ago one of the greatest detectives the world has ever known died. He was John Wilson Murray, Chief Inspector of Criminal Investigation in the Department of Justice of the Province of Ontario. His career was one of the most amazing a man ever had, for more than thirty years in the grim business of the manhunt. Fortunately for readers of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, *John Wilson Murray told the story of his life to his close friend and collaborator, Victor Speer, and we are able here to present the gripping chronicle.*

brother-in-law, who was a county constable named Goodfellow, lived about twenty miles out in the country, and was quite well known there. I hired a team, and Peter and I started to drive from the little village. It was a fine road and we made good time, and about ten o'clock at night we drove up to the crossroads saloon of a little country-corners town. We hitched the team and walked into the saloon. There were six men in the place, apart from the bartender. The seven were drinking together, and all were half drunk. The moment Peter spied them he whispered to me:

"'T'at is Big Polley, und t'e little fellow und he yust got out of t'e penitentiary.'

"I never had seen Drinkwater, but I had a fairly good description. The first man I spied answered the description to a dot—big, burly, rough, with facial marks to make sure. As they all turned, when we asked the bartender for a drink, I saw, to my amazement, that the second man was almost a duplicate of the first. Never have I seen such a remarkable likeness between two men. I was positive one of the two was Baldy, but which one? I could not tell. They were playing pool, and resumed their game as the bartender went behind the bar to serve us. There was a mirror behind the bar, and I could see them clearly as I stood with my back to them. Peter ordered a whiskey. As he did so an idea struck me.

"'What's yours?' asked the bartender.

"'I'll drink water,' I said, rapidly and distinctly; and added, 'with whiskey on the side.'

"As I spoke I watched the six men through the mirror, and saw one of the pair glance up quickly, shift uneasily, eye us a moment, and turn again to the game. I believed I had learned which was Drinkwater. Peter and I finished our drink. How to get the man without a fight and perchance a shooting was puzzling me. Peter read my thoughts. We stepped outside and untied the horses, and drove the team close up to the saloon and beyond the door.

"'Peter,' said I, 'you saw the two men who looked alike, and you know the big one with the gray hat?'

"'Ah, yah,' said Peter.

"'Step in and tell him a woman wants to speak to him at the door!' said I. 'Be sure you come out ahead of him, and when you get out jump for the wagon and the reins.'

"Peter went in. I stood close by the door, holding the reins loosely and ready the moment the door opened. Peter popped out, leaped in the wagon, and caught the reins. Right behind him came the big fellow.

"'Where is she?' he said, as he stepped through the door.

"Without a word I grabbed him and heaved. He was caught unawares, and landed sprawling in the light wagon. Peter sat on him in a jiffy, and I snapped the handcuffs on him and jerked a revolver out of his pocket. The moment he felt himself seized in the dark he yelled for help. Out rushed his friends. They sprang to the horses' heads in the interval of our struggle in the wagon. Two of the crowd drew revolvers. So did Peter and I. The bartender ran out with a light.

"'Thank you, kint frent,' said Peter. 'I kin see to shoot.'

"'Stand back from the horses,' I said.

"They answered with a chorus of oaths. I told them I was a United

States marshal from Chicago. One of them began to yell for a magistrate. My big fellow lay in the wagon swearing like a trooper and beseeching his friends to kill us. A man came out of the back room of the saloon. He seemed to be a magistrate. He told me to show my papers. I told him I was a United States marshal and would not show my papers to him or any one else.

"'If anything happens here, you will be held responsible,' I said to him.

"He called three of the gang into consultation. That left three men.

"'Loose the horses' heads,' I commanded.

"They laughed. I aimed as close as I could for an ear of one of the horses and fired. With a snort the two horses reared, tore loose from the men, and flew down the road at full gallop. I caught the reins while Peter sat on the big fellow, who raged and swore and kicked. The horses were headed for St. Ann's, and I gave them full rein, and they sped through the night like swallows. Peter's human cushion yelled and howled all the way, struggling to free himself, and calling on his friends to follow and kill us. As we neared St. Ann's I tied a kerchief round his mouth, so he would not rouse the whole village. He bit and snapped at it as if he were a mad dog.

"We drew up at the hotel in St. Ann's in the dead of night. The horses were fagged out, and stood panting, wet, drooping. We had to carry our prisoner, kicking and swearing, into the hotel and into a back room to wait for the Chicago train. I expected pursuit, and told the landlord I was a United States Marshal and for him to lock the doors. Hardly had he shot the bolts when we heard the hoof-beats of galloping horses, and then we heard men's voices, and finally they halted outside the hotel and began to bang on the door and fire revolvers.

"'Landlord!' they shouted. 'Open this door in the name of the law. We are officers!'

"The landlord wavered, and finally said he would have to admit them. I had sent Peter into the back room with the prisoner. I had two revolvers, one in each hand. I stood by the door, and when the third of the gang outside had entered I shut and locked the door and faced them.

"'Hands in front of you, please,' I said, and they obeyed. 'Now, who are you, and what do you want?'

"'We are officers and want to see your authority for holding the prisoner you have,' said their spokesman.

"'I am a United States Marshal from Chicago, and I have a warrant from the United States Court for this prisoner, and I am not obliged to show my authority to county constables, bailiffs, or anybody else,' I answered.

"While this was occurring the prisoner kept yelling for them to shoot me, to rescue him, to kill me like a dog.

"'Peter,' I called to the deputy marshal, 'if you hear a scuffle or a shot out here, shoot the prisoner first through the head and then come out.'

"'Ah, yah,' answered Peter from the back room.

"The three men turned to form a group, ostensibly to confer.

"'Face me, please, and keep your hands in front,' said I.

"'May we speak to the prisoner?' said their spokesman.

"'One at a time, from the doorway,' I said.

"One of them went to the doorway, and spoke to the prisoner, who answered with a volley of oaths and a demand that I be killed and he rescued.

"'I guess that's all,' I said when the

prisoner had finished his tirade, and the three filed out at the door.

"As the last one went out he flung himself against the door. I was expecting it, and there was a moment's scuffle, then the door banged amid curses and shouts. Suddenly a shot rang out in the back room, followed by a moan and then all was still except for a faint 'Ah, yah,' from Peter. I hung on to the door, struggling to keep it shut and lock it. When the shot sounded the noises outside ceased. I bolted the door and sprang for the back room. There lay the prisoner, gagged and unhurt, while Peter smilingly eyed a hole in the wall which he had made with the bullet he fired to cause the gang outside to think the prisoner had been killed.

"The Chicago train was due in thirty minutes. I slipped upstairs, and through a window I could see the gang drawn back down the road, and they were drinking. I looked out the back way and saw a rear road leading to the station. I softly opened a back door. I went back to Peter, and we took the prisoner and lugged him out, and away we went to the station. We laid back by a fence corner near the station until the train came in, and then we picked up the prisoner and made a rush for it. We got aboard all right, and the train moved out, while we could see the crowd riding to and fro by the hotel.

"The prisoner was sullen. He kicked at Peter until finally the good-natured German got a pin, and every time the prisoner kicked him Peter drove the pin into him. About the third pin-drive the kicking ceased.

"'Herr Trinkvater, v'at a foony name you haf,' said Peter.

"The prisoner turned to me.

"'I'm Drinkwater,' he said. 'Now take that Dutchman away.'

"Peter instantly began to tell him of his beloved Katrina, and all the way to Chicago little Peter told big Baldy of the beauty and goodness of his sweetheart.

"'Ven I sat on you in t'e wagon, I t'ought of Katrina, you vas so big and soft,' said Peter.

"Drinkwater swore. When we arrived in Chicago, Baldy fought extradition determinedly, but it was no use. Back he came to Owen Sound in Canada, and he was sent to Kingston Penitentiary for seven years."

CHAPTER XXIX

Old John Klippert of Waterloo

JOHN KLIPPERT was the Pooh Bah of the county of Waterloo. He filled many offices, and filled them ably too. He was chief constable and crier of the court and bailiff and issuer of marriage licenses and deputy sheriff, and several other officials, all in one. He was a keen, shrewd fellow, abrupt in his manner and picturesque in his speech. He had sandy hair and a sandy mustache, and he used to toddle along with his head well forward, conversing amiably with himself. The county of Waterloo was known to him from end to end, every nook and corner.

It is a rich county, and among its settlers was a colony of sturdy German loyalists who moved from Pennsylvania to Ontario in the early days of the history of the United States. Klippert was of German ancestry, and he reminded his hearers constantly of the fact by his entertaining English.

"The farms of the county of Waterloo were well stocked," said Murray, "and in 1888 horses began to disappear. The stealing increased, until Mr. Snyder, the member of Parliament

from Waterloo, spoke to me about the matter. Klippert also had written to me about it and described some of the horses.

"Klippert worried me as time passed, and he pestered me with letters. At length I telegraphed him to get a warrant and come to Toronto. Old John arrived on the early train next day. It was the fair time in Toronto. Detective Burrows had seen James Little, a notorious horse thief and head of a bad family, at the fair grounds the day before. Little had a son, Tom, who was a highwayman.

"I sent old John out to the fair grounds. Little had been trying to sell a couple of horses. Burrows spied him and pointed him out to old John. Klippert drew back about one hundred feet and carefully took out his handcuffs and carried them under his coat tails.

"Then he advanced stealthily, as if about to sprinkle salt on a bird's tail. Old Little was gazing at the crowd when suddenly a hand was thrust into his face and a hoarse voice said:

"'Surrender!'

"Old John compelled Little to hold out his wrists and be handcuffed. Then he led him over in triumph, and I met them.

"'I got him!' he exclaimed.

"Even old Little laughed.

"'What is the case against me?' he asked.

"That puzzled old John. He called me aside, keeping a watchful eye on old Little.

"What case do I haf on him, Shon?' he asked.

"'You'll have to work it up,' I said, to have some fun. 'I'm sure he's your man, but you'll have to prove it.'

"I intended to send the witnesses to Berlin, the county seat of Waterloo, the next day. So I told Klippert to take old Little to Berlin and work out the case. The old constable was perplexed, but he took it seriously and bade me good-by.

"'Come on,' he said to Little.

"What happened then I learned afterward from both Klippert and Little. On the train old John began to talk of Little's hard luck.

"'Too bad, too bad,' said old John. 'I'm sorry to haf to take you back. T'at Vaterloo is a bad county for horse stealers. T'e shuries t'ey is yust death on horse thieves. T'ey socks it to a man, und t'ey always ask t'e shudge to sock it to him. T'at is part of t'e verdict, a plea from t'e shury to t'e shudge to sock it to t'e stealers and t'e thievers.'

"Old Little listened while honest old John told him of how the farmers hated a horse thief, and how they tried to get them sent down for twenty years, and how they were stirred up by recent thefts so that they were ready almost to take the thief out of jail and string him up to the limb of a tree. The more old John, in his simple, broken way, talked of the tense state of affairs in the county, the more impressed was old Little over the dangers of his predicament.

"'Ven we get to Berlin I yust will see you safe in jail and tell no one but t'e shudge who you are und vat I got you for,' said old John.

"Little asked old John if it was necessary to tell the judge about his record. Klippert said it depended. If Little desired to take a jury trial all the facts of his career would have to come out. If Little wished to make no trouble and take a speedy trial before the judge, without a jury, his past would not necessarily have to come out.

"'Of course,' said old John, 't'e case I haf on you is so plain t'at t'ere

will be no use to fight it. I yust show t'e shudge t'e evidence, und he say Guilty.'

"Old Little told John he would take a speedy trial if old John would not rake up his record, and if he would put in a good word with the judge to get him off.

"'Yah, yah,' said John, 'I will ax t'e shudge. You was a vise man.'

"So old John took old Little before County Judge Da Costa and charged him with horse stealing.

"'I plead guilty,' said old Little.

"The judge withdrew to a side room. Old John went in to see him a moment, and then returned to old Little.

"'T'e shudge he want to know if you vas honest,' said old John. 'I say yah, you vas. T'e shudge he ask me vere you sold t'e horse. Vat shall I tell him? Shall I tell him t'e right place or some wrong place?'

"'Tell him the right place," said old Little. 'You know—Burns's coal yard in Toronto.'

"Old John went back, and later old Little was brought up for sentence. Klippert meanwhile had telegraphed to Toronto and located the horse, and its owner identified it. Then old John, when Little was to be sentenced, said to the judge:

"'Shudge, t'is man iss an old villain. His whole family t'ey is stealers and thievers. He ought to go to prison for life.'

"Old John painted old Little so black that the notorious old horse thief did not even recognize his own record.

"The judge sent Little to Kingston for seven years. Klippert was delighted.

"'I worked out my case, eh, Shon?' he said to me, and chuckled.

"Old Little was sore as a bear with the toothache. He blamed himself for being caught by old John's honest, blunt manner.

"'There's no fool like an old fool,' said Little, 'and I am the old one in this case.'

"From Klippert's viewpoint it was all right. He worked up his case after he got his man. As to the change of front toward old Little, every man must be his own arbiter in such matters. The man who would achieve the greatest success in the detective business must keep his word absolutely when he gives it. Oftentimes confidence of others in his word will bring success where otherwise there would be failure. The detective who breaks his word is marked among crooks just as among other men—in fact, he is marked more clearly and more disastrously. If he does not wish to keep his word, he should not give it.

"John Klippert, however, viewed the case from his standpoint, and his course appeared all right. He never saw Little before and he never expected to see him again; and his business was to protect his county and show no favor to those who showed no favor to it. He used to chuckle over the case and often spoke of it. Klippert was a faithful, efficient man. Old Little finally forgave him, and wrote him a letter, saying:

"'If I had a horse I would drive to Berlin and see you.'

"Old John sent word to him that if he ever set foot in the county of Waterloo the farmers would string him up by his heels and pitchfork him into eternity upside down. Old Little must have believed him, for he never poked his nose into Waterloo thereafter.

"Klippert was with me on an oc-

casion when I bade as dapper a little crook as ever did wrong to keep out of Canada. The affair began in the old days back in Erie. A suave, polished little fellow stepped off a train one day in Erie and registered at the Reed House as J. O. Flanders. He was as pleasant as could be, and made friends quickly. I met him and played billiards with him, and we became well acquainted. He said he was connected with the Claflins in New York, and he soon knew the leading merchants of Erie. He made friends particularly with Church, the merchant, producing a forged letter of introduction.

"One day he went to the bank, with Church to identify him, and deposited a draft for thirty thousand dollars. The next day he went to the bank alone and drew twenty-five thousand dollars and skipped with the money. The draft turned out to be worthless. We set out to find him. Not a trace of him could we get. If he had kept out of women troubles, we never would have landed him. But he stole another crook's woman, and that made the other crook angry; and we were tipped that J. O. Flanders was living in grand style at the Spencer House at Indianapolis, Indiana. Crowley and I went out there to take Flanders back to Erie.

"Never had I seen such a complete change of appearance as there was in J. O. Flanders. His own mother would not have known him for the man who was in Erie. Hair, complexion, walk, manner, all were changed. He had plenty of money, and over twenty-two thousand dollars was found on him. He was taken before Judge Morris, who, to our great surprise, released him.

"We appealed, but Flanders had taken his twenty-two thousand dollars and was gone, and we returned to Erie. Nine months later he was caught in Fort Wayne. His twenty-two thousand dollars had dwindled to two hundred dollars when he was arrested. Crowley and I went after him a second time and got him safe in jail. The night before I was to take him away he thumped a jailer on the head, stunning him, and escaped. I thought at the time the jailer was in on the game. Then I returned to Erie in disgust, and said I was through monkeying with Flanders.

"Several years later, when I was with the Canada Southern Railroad, F. N. Finney and I walked into Strong's Hotel at London, Ontario, and who should be back of the desk as clerk but my old friend J. O. Flanders.

"'Great God!' he whispered to me. 'Are you after me again?'

"'Not on your life!' I answered. 'I quit chasing you in Indiana when they let you go.'

"'Don't give me away, Murray,' he pleaded. 'I blew all the money in six months.'

"'I'm not going to give you away,' I said. 'But I am vexed at that jailer.'

"Mr. Finney had gone to bed, but I sat up until three o'clock in the morning with Flanders, while he told me of himself and of crooks he had known.

"'You did wrong to accuse the jailer,' he said. 'He did not let me go.'

"I went away the next day, and I lost track of Flanders. Along toward 1888 I was with old John Klippert at Berlin, when none other than J. O. Flanders stepped off the train.

"'John,' said I to Klippert, 'tell that polite, fine gentleman over there that his presence is desired in the United States.'

"Old John walked over and thumped Flanders on the shoulder.

'You're vanted in t'e States, and vanted quick,' said old John.

"'Thank you, my deah fellah, I know it well,' said Flanders.

"Old John gasped. He hastened back to me and exclaimed:

"'He admits it, Shon; he admits it! Vill I jigger him? Say t'e word, Shon, und I got him.'

"Flanders spied me and promptly came over and bowed. I explained to him that I had changed positions since seeing him in London, and perhaps, if he still contemplated the easy, anxious life, it would be better for him to sojourn in the States. He understood, bowed politely, thanked me for past courtesies, and took the waiting train out of Berlin again. Old John gazed after him.

"'He looked a shentleman, but I could tell he was a horse thiever,' said old John, and he chuckled, then looked at me and said: 'I can tell 'em efery time, t'e horse thievers, Shon,' and he shook his old head wisely.

"I never saw Flanders again."

CHAPTER XXX

The Shanty City of Slabtown

SLABTOWN was a sprawling settlement of shanties along the feeder to the Welland Canal on the outskirts of Dunnville. It was a government reserve, and the residents were squatters. They were a motley population, who paid no rent, and fished or lolled through life with an only occasional industrious man among them. They were as distinct, in their way, as a nation apart from Canada, for they seemed to have had a code of morals all their own, and their customs in business were unique.

One of the flourishing features of trade in Slabtown was in wives. They traded wives like knives, in Slabtown, a fair swap and so much to boot. The women did not object, and the families increased and multiplied on the bank of the canal, one mother and several fathers.

This resulted in quite a tax on the memory of Slabtown society. Mrs. Sallie Poney, for instance—using fictitious names—had seven children. One was Johnnie Poney Scollie, another was Mickey Poney Ready, another was Luella Poney Stott, another was Mabelle Poney Watkins, another was Thomas Poney Colter, another was Samson Poney Pettingil, and another was Tillie Poney Scollie, for in the end Mrs. Sallie had been traded back to the father of Johnnie Poney Scollie. Tobias Stott could point, as could other men of Slabtown, to a fine family of sons and daughters scattered through the shanties. Not all the elite of Slabtown were of the Stott or Scollie kins, of course, or the population would have become hopelessly mixed. As it was, a man might be living with his great aunt, while an uncle traded for his niece's daughter by his aunt's son. In fact, one Slabtown dame once said that she had become her own mother.

"'Sure, Patty Scollie is his own grandfather, for he traded for his father's great aunt's mother's son's daughter,' said he.

A stranger appeared in Dunnville on October 31, 1888.

"He was an old gentleman," said Murray, "about fifty-five, well dressed apparently respectable. He had money. About eleven o'clock at night John Upper, living near the canal bridge on the edge of Slabtown, heard a loud scream and a splash in the water, then a clatter on the bridge, as if a man ran across it to Slabtown. Upper spoke to several persons about it, and in the

morning they looked for sign of a struggle, but nothing was to be seen.

"Nine days later a body was found floating in the canal west of the bridge. It proved to be that of the old gentleman who was in Dunnville on October 31. He had been murdered before the body was thrown into the canal. There was no water in the lungs, and the base of the skull was fractured. The pockets were turned inside out, his money was gone, no papers were found on him, and there was no clew to his identity. He was last seen about five o'clock in the afternoon on his way to Slabtown, slightly under the influence of liquor. I sent out his picture and long afterward I learned that he was a harness-maker named Lowrie, from Toronto.

"The autopsy I ordered, when I had the body exhumed on my arrival, showed that the man was not only dead when put in the water, but the body was still warm. This was shown, said the doctors, by the fact that what a layman calls goose-flesh, was visible. This appears and remains when a warm body is put in water. Thus it was evident that the old gentleman had been attacked, had screamed, had been struck on the head with a blunt instrument and killed, then had been robbed and the body thrown in the water.

"I became a frequenter of Slabtown. I collected a marvelous mass of information. You can get all kinds of information in Slabtown. Anything you want to know, they will tell you. I learned from a Slabtowner, named Henry Overhold, that three hours before John Upper heard the scream and splash in the night, Joe Clemo, of Slabtown, had stopped at Overhold's and told him that before morning he would be a rich man. Joe Clemo then went out and returned to Overhold's house at seven o'clock in the morning, and drew a big roll of bills from his pocket and slapped down on the floor.

"'Hanky,' said Joe Clemo, 'I made that since I saw you last.'

"Overhold told this to me solemnly. I looked up Joe Clemo's record and found he was a bad egg, and for so young a man he had spent much time in the penitentiary. I learned from an hotel man in Dunnville that two days before the murder, Joe Clemo had borrowed five cents. He always was broke.

"I called on the aristocracy of Slabtown. They received me with open arms and soapsudsy hands or fishy fingers. Huldy Smith led me out to the bank of the canal, and there told me that Joe Clemo had called on her when John William Smith was out.

"'Joey showed me the squidge of bills, and he shook them to me so's I smelt 'em, and he says to me: "Huldy, fly with me to the United States," Joey says it to me.'

"'Was that all he said?' I asked.

"'Oh, no,' said Huldy. 'He says he love me and I smelled the bills again. Bills has a funny smell.'

"'Didn't Joey tell you where he got the bills?' I asked.

"'No; I didn't ask,' said Huldy.

"'But if Joey really had loved you he would have told you where he got them,' said I.

"Huldy bridled up.

"'Huh!' said she. 'So he did tell me. While I was smelling the bills Joey Clemo whispers to me: "Huldy, I love you; fly with me; and I killed an old man because I had to hit him to rob him, and I hit him harder than I meant, so when he wouldn't come to I pitched him in the canal. Fly with me." I told Joey that was no way to get money, and for him to go on about his own business and fly himself, but he wouldn't fly me with him. I stood

by for John William, who ain't hitting people too hard on the head and pitching bodies into the canal.'

"I found Joe Clemo had skipped out a few days after the murder. I hunted him for months, and finally heard of a fellow answering his description near Essex Centre, in the county of Essex. I went there late in March, and on April 4 I arrested the man, who was Joe Clemo. He had stopped at a farmhouse and was on his way to the United States. I handcuffed him, but said nothing about the charge against him.

"'What are you arrested for?' asked the farmer's wife.

"'Oh, I am arrested for murder, that's all,' said Joe Clemo.

"He had excellent power of divination. He evidently expected to be arrested for a murder. Men who have done no murder seldom expect to be arrested for killing a man. I took Joe Clemo to Cayuga before Squire Wintermute, and I summoned a number of Slabtown witnesses, and the magistrate was satisfied of Joe Clemo's guilt, and on April 16, 1889, Joe Clemo was held for trial. Sam Smith, who, it was said, had been seen in Joe Clemo's company, also was remanded. I arrested Sam in Dunnville, but later no bill was found against him.

"In making ready for the trial of Joe Clemo, I found the Slabtowners eager to be called in the case. Every time they told their story they made it stronger, as if they feared they would be overlooked unless their testimony was sensational and positive. They seemed to enter into a competition to see who could tell the most damaging story against Joe Clemo. This rivalry became so keen that Joe Clemo, according to the tales of the women witnesses, had waved the bank notes before several women and while they smelled them, Joe had said: 'Fly with me.' When Huldy Smith said Joe had asked her first, another promptly declared Joe Clemo had asked her three times and had showed her how he had killed the old gentleman and had dived with the body to the bottom of the canal and had stuck it head first in the bottom so it would not come up, and had robbed it under water so no one would see him do it. One of the women finally said that Joey embraced her and said: 'You need not fly with me, if you don't want to. I love you so that you can take the money and not fly.' She added that she refused the money. This aroused other witnesses to still greater efforts.

"I conferred, finally, with Crown Prosecutor Colin Macdougall, and I explained the situation to him and said frankly that it was one of the strangest cases I ever had encountered. Meanwhile, the grand jury, after calling only a few of the witnesses, had found a true bill against Joe Clemo, and his trial came on before Chief Justice Armour. We were in an awkward position. While I thought Joe Clemo did the deed, I did not think the witnesses were telling the truth, as they kept changing their stories constantly, and finally, as I have said, got into a competition as to who could tell the strongest story. Joe Clemo was defended by an able counsel, the present Judge Snyder, of Hamilton. I had a conversation with him, and he had very little hope of getting Joe Clemo out of his trouble. I had another conversation with the crown prosecutor and advised him to speak to Chief Justice Armour about the matter. I knew there would be no restraining many of the witnesses, once they got on the stand. They simply would vie with one

another to tell the biggest story and make the grandest appearance on the stand. She who carried off the honors would be queen of Slabtown, and her various children would bask in her glory. However, we hit on a plan of our own.

"First we proved the death of the old gentleman. Then we selected some of our choicest Slabtown witnesses. Sarah Scollie was one. Sarah Scollie and Sally Poney were not the same women.

"Sarah told her story. It was just grand to see her swell before the Slabtowners on the benches. Then came her cross-examination.

"'Are you married, Sarah?' asked Mr. Snyder politely.

"'None of your damn business,' replied Sarah haughtily, with her nose elevated and her head held high, as a sign of utter disdain.

"Sarah meant to squelch her cross-examiner. So she gave him the Slabtown snub. Her answer gave the judge and jury an idea of Sarah's character. She was instructed to answer the question.

"'Not by a damn sight,' said Sarah.

"She was asked with whom she was living at that time.

"'Sam Smith,' said Sarah, sniffing.

"'How long have you lived with Sam?'

"'Two years,' said the haughty Sarah.

"'With whom did you live before that?'

"'Ben Hughes,' said Sarah, glaring.

"'How long?'

"'About a year and a half,' said Sarah.

"'Was there not a dicker between Sam Smith and Ben Hughes about your transfer?'

"Sarah tossed her head and looked unutterable scorn.

"'What transfer?' she snapped.

"'Of you to Smith.'

"Sarah glared. The court instructed her to answer.

"'Yes!' exclaimed Sarah. 'A cow and a couple of dollars.'

"Sarah stepped down. Next came Mrs. McCann. She was of the same stripe, only she was better-natured than Sarah. She had lived with one man after another and there had been bargains and barter. After a few more of these witnesses the judge asked Mr. Macdougall if that was the kind of witnesses the Crown proposed to produce throughout the prosecution.

"'We take the witnesses just as they come,' said Mr. Macdougall.

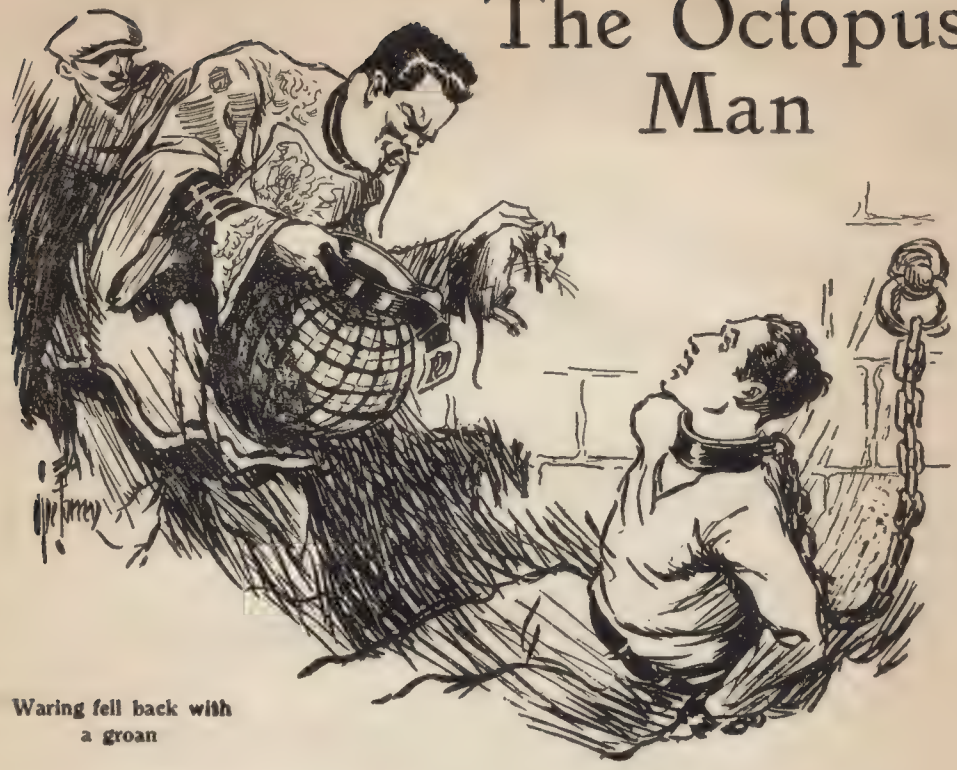
"'Well, I would not hang a dog on the testimony of such witnesses,' said the court.

"We had some respectable witnesses, but they were not our main ones. Joe Clemo went free. He was the hardest-looking man in the dock I ever saw. He was cross-eyed, so that he seemed to hold his head sidewise to see you. He was so well known as a bad character that the jury would have been apt to convict him. I was under the impression he was guilty, but I did not think it right to convict a man on the testimony of people whom the Crown officer did not believe; and, under the circumstances, I was glad he was acquitted.

"Numerous unsuccessful efforts were made to break up Slabtown. The ministers and county councils and others tried it, but it stayed. There were honest, industrious folk in Slabtown. It was not a nest of thieves or a mere place of dissolute people. They simply were traders, even in wives."

TO BE CONTINUED

The Octopus Man



Waring fell back with a groan

Two Helpless Women in a Lonely Cottage—Outside, Crawling Through the Woods, Harris's Mad Boy, the Strangler!

By Garnett Radcliffe

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

EBENEZER DREEN, an American millionaire visiting England, is kidnaped by a crime king who calls himself Harris and has organized a band of crooks known as the Flower Gang. Harris is holding Dreen for a ransom of three-quarters of his fortune, but Dreen refuses. Harris tries to kidnap Dreen's wife, but fails because of the timely interference of Captain Waring, a young friend of Dreen.

Captain Waring discovers the hiding place of the crooks, but he, too, falls into their hands.

Harris has ordered Waring thrown into a strange cell named the "bird-cage."

In the meantime, Pamela Wainwright, fiancée of Dick Waring, is keeping Mrs. Dreen hidden in an isolated cottage. Harris sends an agent to capture Mrs. Dreen, but the agent fails in his mission, and goes back to Harris to report his reasons for not carrying off Mrs. Dreen a prisoner.

This story began in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for November 9

Harris orders the agent decapitated, and the order is about to be executed when Dick Waring, who has escaped from his cell, bursts in on the crooks.

Waring is recaptured, and Harris lays plans for the capture of Pamela, and sends " the Strangler " to get Mrs. Dreen. In the meantime, Cheeta Ram, Waring's Gurkha orderly, has found his way to Harris's headquarters, and gained entrance. He is searching through the house when he hears the noise of a barrel-organ.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Music Cell

HAPPY is the man who has been presented at birth with two non-conflicting talents and a love for music, and thrice happy is he who by combining the two former can gratify the last. Sung Ling could.

Although the Chinese's greatest gift undoubtedly was in the direction of torture, he had also a passion for, and an undoubted ingenuity in, inventing mechanical devices. Those were his two talents and, so far from clashing, the secondary talent was actually helpful to the greater. Also he had a love for music. Really good music.

One day, when seeking fresh inspiration in Mr. Harris's well-stocked library, Sung Ling had come across a story of the Spanish Inquisition which gave him an idea that promised to employ both his talents and at the same time to gratify his love for music. It was the story of how a captured heretic was compelled to blow an organ in a cathedral in Madrid. As long as he continued blowing he was safe; when he stopped from exhaustion a weight descended from the roof and squashed him to a jelly.

With that story in his mind Sung Ling had at his own expense constructed a somewhat similar device. But he had improved upon the original. Instead of the weight descending on the cessation of the music, boiling water rushed in through a grating in the floor. And as real organs were expensive he had had to be content with the barrel variety. The music produced was not good, but Sung Ling considered it better than no music at all.

He had just completed this contrivance and was anxiously waiting for some one to test it when Ebenezer N. Dreen was brought to Elmgrove Hall. Sung Ling considered that he would suit the purpose admirably. He asked Mr. Harris's permission to place Dreen in what he termed the " music cell " and Mr. Harris gave it, adding the proviso that on no account was the boiling water to be allowed to kill him outright. He might be scalded a little just to shake his nerve, but not so badly as to render him incapable of writing and signing a letter. This, Sung Ling promised to see to.

Accordingly, very shortly after the interview with Mr. Harris which was related in the second chapter, the bewildered multi-millionaire was placed in the " music cell " and informed that unless he turned the handle of the barrel-organ therein something very unpleasant would happen. Dreen replied to the effect that he'd wait until hell froze over before he mangled music for any gosh-darned Chink. Sung Ling smiled sweetly and left him. Five minutes later the boiling water began to pour through the grating and the floor of the cell was covered with scalding steam.

Even then it was some time before the American yielded to the inevitable.

He tried to break down the door and the water came through his patent-leather dancing shoes. He tried to stop up the grating and the steam took the skin off his face and hands. Then he gave in. He began to twist the handle of the barrel organ and to the tune of "There Is a Happy Land" the water percolated away through some hidden exit and the steam vanished.

For the next thirty hours Ebenezer N. Dreen played that barrel-organ with brief intervals for meals, during which Sung Ling kindly disconnected the apparatus. During that period he played every tune in the organ's limited repertoire some two hundred odd times, and said things about Chinese and barrel-organs that surprised even himself and would have shocked his old mother way back in Rockville Penn, United States of America, into her grave.

Yet had Dreen only known it, he should have been grateful to that barrel-organ. Its strains provoked such curiosity in Cheeta Ram's mind that he crept down the passage to the cell door and peered through the grating.

Cheeta Ram saw at a glance that the big gray-haired Sahib in evening dress with the tortoise shell-rimmed spectacles was not playing that organ for his own amusement. He seemed almost too overcome with exhaustion to turn the handle. As Cheeta Ram watched he slackened for a moment and a puff of white steam came up through the grating in the floor.

Cheeta Ram decided that Dreen was not one of the "bad men," but one of the bad men's victims, like Captain Waring Sahib. He might be a useful ally.

"Sahib," Cheeta Ram called softly through the grating.

"Get, you dirty, yellow-faced son of a Chink," the big man replied without turning his head. "You're wearing the smile now, but as sure as my name is Ebenezer N. Dreen I'll pay you every blue cent that's owing. I'll give you music, you—"

"Me friend," Cheeta Ram called. "You want get away me help. Me open door now."

The door was bolted on the outside, but not locked. The Gurkha slid back the bolts with as little noise as possible.

"Who in hell are you?" Dreen cried.

"Friend," Cheeta Ram repeated. "Me come find Captain Waring Sahib. Save you, too. Come quick."

Dreen glanced over his shoulder and saw that the door was open and a little brown man whom he had never seen before was crouching on the threshold.

"Probably it's another trick, but I'll risk it," he said, and ceased to turn the handle. The boiling water came spurting in. The American cleared it with a bound and in another instant was standing in the passage beside Cheeta Ram. His first act was to seize the Gurkha by the throat.

"If this isn't on the square you say your prayers right now," he said. "Spit it out. Are you a pal or is this another of that fat hell-hound's little games?"

"Me friend," Cheeta Ram gasped. "You know my Captain Waring Sahib? He my master."

At the mention of Waring's name Dreen released the Gurkha's throat and stood staring. Waring! The dance in Waring House! It seemed so remote that it was like hearing of an event that had happened in another and dimly remembered incarnation.

"Captain Waring?" he repeated. "The young husky with the shoulders who beat my grip! I know *him* sure enough. But don't tell me *he's* here, too!"

"He save old Mem-sahib," Cheeta

Ram said. "Bad men take old Mem-sahib from big house in Madison Square. My Sahib and Lady Pamela Mem-Sahib follow and take her out of ambulance. Then my Sahib climb in ambulance and come here. Me come save him."

"Gosh, I reckon it's Mamie you mean!" Dreen cried. "By gosh, I see it now! Some of John Bunny's cute lads must have tried to nab her and Waring put the kybosh on their little game. Some boy! I think that I owe you and Captain Waring a mighty big slice of gratitude. Saved Mamie did you! Shake—"

They shook hands gravely.

"Now, son, what's the next move?" Dreen asked. "Clear while the goin's good, I guess. This house isn't exactly a health resort where you might like to linger."

"First find Captain Waring Sahib then go," Cheeta Ram said.

"Sure," Dreen agreed, but in his heart he felt that to attempt to find Waring in that labyrinth of dark passages was an impossible task. Every minute they stayed in the house their danger was increasing. At any moment Sung Ling or some other member of the gang might notice the stopping of the music and come to investigate.

Then Cheeta Ram took what to the American's mind was an appalling risk. He put his fingers to his mouth and uttered a peculiar birdlike call. Three times he repeated it. It was a signal that he and Waring had been wont to use when out scouting on the Indian Frontier. He knew that if Waring was anywhere within hearing he would reply.

Something stung the American's foot. He put his hand down and discovered that the floor of the corridor was being flooded by boiling water that had streamed through the open door of the music cell. At the same instant he heard approaching footsteps and saw the glimmer of a lantern.

He turned to warn Cheeta Ram, but the Gurkha had disappeared. Not knowing what to do, Dreen backed against the wall and stood motionless. Minutes passed like eternities. Then came the faint sounds of a scuffle, a coughing grunt and silence again. A hand touched Dreen's arm. He swung round with clenched fists to find Cheeta Ram by his side. The Gurkha was now carrying a lantern of the "bull's-eye" variety and a long knife that smoked and dripped.

"You come quick," he breathed in Dreen's ear. "Many men come. Better we go before they find body."

Of all the weird experiences of the millionaire's checkered career the search that now ensued through those nightmarish passages was surely the most weird. It seemed to him that the farther they went the deeper they penetrated into the bowels of the earth. The darkness pressed like a tangible thing. Again and again Cheeta Ram paused to utter the shrill, birdlike cry, but there was no answer.

Suddenly they heard a stifled groan. It seemed to come from beyond the door of one of the many cells. Cheeta Ram tried the door and to his surprise it opened. He entered and flashed the lantern round. Then he gave a glad cry.

"Captain Waring Sahib! We've come!"

Dreen, following on the Gurkha's heels, could just discern the form of a big man in blood-stained plus-fours lying full length on the floor. He was secured by a heavy chain, one end of which was fastened to an iron collar

around his neck, and the other to a staple in the wall. His hands were handcuffed behind his back. Over his face a globe of close wire mesh, rather similar to those worn by fencers and fitting tightly about the neck, had been fastened. His mouth was gagged.

Then Dreen bending over him saw something that caused him to cry out in horror. Inside the globe, just discernible through the meshes of the wire, was a live rat. It had been seated on the prisoner's face, but at the glare of the lantern it squeaked and tried to burrow away beneath his head.

"My God!" said Dreen. "My God!"

Cheeta Ram with tears pouring down his cheeks was on his knees tearing at the buckles of the thick leather band that held the globe in position. His hands trembled so with rage that he could scarcely control them. At last the buckle opened. Tenderly he lifted the globe off and there—looking up at him in mute appeal from the floor—lay Sung Ling. For once his face was not expressionless. If ever a man looked indignant, surprised and furious, the Chinese torturer did at that moment.

"Don't let the rat go," Dreen cried. "I reckon the guy that did this knew what he was about. Say, Chink, how are you feelin'? You've been hoist by your own petard, haven't you?"

Despite the danger, the American could not repress a roar of delighted laughter. What had happened was all too obvious. Sung Ling had indeed been hoist by his own petard. For the first time he had had to test the efficacy of one of his own fiendish devices.

Cheeta Ram's tears had vanished. The little man was grinning from ear to ear with overweening pride.

"*My* Sahib did this," he said| "These his clothes—me see them many time. Him Chinaman come put thing over head with rat, my Sahib knock him down and dress him in own clothes. Then my Sahib go away quick, leaving Chinaman here in place. Good joke!"

"My gosh, and I once thought Britishers were soft!" Dreen said. "But say, what's that in the corner? Just twist the flash round a second till we have a look."

Cheeta Ram flashed the lantern into the corner indicated and they saw something they had not previously noticed. The body of a man was huddled motionless against the wall. He was a small man with protruding teeth like a rat's. When Dreen turned him over with his foot his head fell back limply and they saw his lower jaw was crooked.

"Broken neck," was Dreen's diagnosis. "More of your Sahib's handiwork, I guess. That boy wasn't given a three hundred pound grip only to crack nuts! But what's our next move? Your Sahib's escaped and I reckon we can't do better than follow his good example."

Cheeta Ram had succeeded in recapturing the rat and placing it inside the wire globe. He now placed the globe over the Chinese's head and refastened the leather strap. Dreen chuckled as he watched.

"Say, Chink," he said. "I'm not a vindictive man as a rule, but if I'd a bottle of sherry bitters handy I'd pour it down that rat's throat to stimulate his appetite. I only hope he bites you good and well before your pals come—you damned, torturing weasel. Say, if it doesn't beat the snake's hips to think of you being tied up with a rat chewing your yellow mask and you not able to squeak!"

While the millionaire was triumph-

ing over his tormentor Cheeta Ram had stolen out of the cell into the passage. Although he had not said so to Dreen he had been puzzled by the ease with which they seemed to have shaken off their pursuers. When he had killed the Flower who was carrying the lantern he had distinctly heard other footsteps running down the passage. Their escape must be known by now—why had the pursuit not been continued? He feared a trap. With his ear close to the floor he listened hard, but the catacombs were filled with a silence more sinister than any sound.

Suddenly he noticed a curious, pungent smell—not unlike the odor of decaying seaweed. Where had he smelled that smell before? Then he remembered. It had been in the trenches in front of Deauville Wood where he, a sepoy of the Indian Expeditionary Force, had spent many weary months. It was the smell of chloride of phosgene, the suffocating gas, that was one of the most horrible inventions of the war.

He darted back into the cell and caught Dreen's arm.

"Sahib, come quick! Gas! They send gas down from above!"

The American sniffed and turned pale. He, too, recognized the odor. As a stretcher bearer with the Red Cross he had become all too familiar with chloride of phosgene and its effect.

"By the Great Harry, you're right!" he cried. "Devils! We might have known they'd have another dirty trick up their sleeve!"

Cheeta Ram had already begun to cough and choke. Chloride of phosgene does not as a rule kill unless given in great quantities, but it induces all the agonies of suffocation in its victims who feel as if they were being slowly drowned. Dreen felt for a handkerchief, failed to find one, and tore off one of the tails of his dress coat. This he tied over mouth and nose.

The lantern had gone out and the darkness seemed to add to the horror of the gas. Cheeta Ram was rolling and choking upon the floor. The American bent and groped in the darkness until he found him. Then he slung the little man over his shoulder and reeled out of the cell. His lungs were bursting and his head felt as though a red-hot iron band was being slowly compressed about the temples.

A minute later he was staggering through the poison-saturated blackness of the passage. As more gas was liberated from the cylinder above, so the flood of poison in the underground passages rose inch by inch. To suffocate them like rats in the darkness—such was the amiable design of the Flowers. It was Colonel Lowry who was directing operations. Despite his military rank his gallantry was not such as to make him fancy the idea of hunting two such men as Cheeta Ram and Dreen through a dark labyrinth of passages. The gas was the easier and the safer way.

Dreen was now reeling from side to side of the passage. He could no longer breathe; there was a roaring in his ears and a myriad rockets appeared to be exploding inside his head. Only his great strength and his indomitable will kept him on his feet. But even in his agony he had one consoling thought. Whatever they were suffering, Sung Ling, lying chained upon the floor of the cell, must be getting a pretty good dose of the same poison!

Suddenly his foot struck the lowest of a flight of stone steps. He fell forward and began to crawl on hands and

knees, striving to drag himself above the level of the gas. Ten steps—eleven steps—he bumped into a cold, hard obstruction that felt like an iron door. He rose to his feet, found he could breathe, and drew deep, delicious gasps of air into his tortured lungs. The gas had not yet risen to the top of the steps, but it was mounting higher like an incoming tide every moment. Unless they could pass the barrier they were done.

He laid the unconscious Gurkha on the top step and flung himself against the door. It gave at once and he fell full length through the aperture. Before he could rise a dozen figures wearing masks had flung themselves upon him. His struggles were of no avail. In a few seconds both he and Cheeta Ram had been trussed up like a couple of chickens.

"Thought we'd smoke the blighters out!" a drawling voice said. It was the voice of Colonel Lowry, whose health Dreen had drunk at the Waring House dance about thirty-six hours before.

CHAPTER XIX

Waring's Escape

AND meantime what of Waring? At the moment that Dreen was staggering through the gas with Cheeta Ram on his shoulder Waring was searching Elmgrove village for Ned Squirrel who, so rumor had it, knew where Charlie Heap was likely to be found. Charlie Heap was the only man in the village who sold gasoline, and Waring wanted Charlie Heap as he had seldom wanted anything before.

His escape from Elmgrove Hall had been a highly satisfactory affair. There had been an element of poetic justice about it. Of all the episodes in a career that had not been uneventful, that escape was one of those that Waring found it pleasantest to recall.

When—as was related at the end of the seventh chapter—he had been left by Sung Ling to await the "helmet," whatever that might be, his spirits had been at very low ebb indeed. For that the effects of the drug and the agonizing feeling of impotence so cleverly induced by Mr. Harris were mainly responsible. He had felt that he was beaten, could struggle no longer. He simply lay supine on the floor of the cell and tried not to think of what would happen at Queensmarry that night.

But Waring was not a man to stay down for long. Tight corners were no novelty to him. He made no pretence of being an invincible super-man, such as one reads of in sensational fiction, but he was pretty resourceful and endowed with physical strength above the average. Also he was the public school, army type of young Englishman who—despite what the croakers say—is not easily downed.

After about an hour he found to his great joy that the weakening effects of the drug were rapidly wearing off. He had only had a whiff or two, and in any case the effects of this particular drug were not very lasting. To accelerate the return of his strength he tried deep breathing. In another twenty minutes he felt almost as strong as ever.

Then he began to examine his situation more attentively. The great chain which was fastened to the iron collar round his neck was about six feet long and the staple which secured it to the wall was fixed about four feet from the floor. That allowed a certain amount of radius for action.

He rose to his feet with some difficulty—a heavy chain fastened to one's neck and the hands being handcuffed behind one's back does not exactly make for agility—and performed some rather curious acrobatic exercises. He put his left foot forward as far as the chain would permit, bent his left knee, and raised his right foot as high in the air as it would go. Several times the weight of the chain caused him to fall over backward, but he persisted, performing the exercise all round the circumference of a semicircle the center of which was the staple in the wall, and the radius of which was the length of the chain, plus the length of his body. He had just completed these mysterious rites when he heard voices coming down the passage. At once he threw himself face downward on the floor close to the wall so that his neck was directly below the staple and the slack of the chain lying beside him.

The voices he heard were those of Sung Ling and an American fratricide called Love-in-the-Mist. Love-in-the-Mist was a recently recruited Flower. He was a short Flower with protruding front teeth and a peculiarly criminal expression. He had accompanied Sung Ling in order to assist the Chinese to place the helmet over Waring's head. He was carrying a large live rat wrapped in a dirty handkerchief, while Sung Ling carried the wire mesh globe designated as the helmet.

Sung Ling was in an unusually loquacious mood. He had disliked Waring ever since the incident in the laboratory and was pleased at the thought of getting his revenge. So pleased was he that he actually became jocular.

"This vellee good beauty tleatment," he said, in his voice that was like the clicking of chop-sticks, to Waring's motionless back. "Look, Mr. Englishman. Me place helmet over face with rat inside. Vellee soon rat get hungly and wantee eat. No food in helmet, only face of Mr. Englishman. First rat vellee aflaid, but vellee soon get bold. P'laps he eat Mr. Englishman's nose first; p'laps he eat Mr. Englishman's ears. Mr. Englishman makee muchee noise. Rat no mindee noise. Vellee soon all face eaten and Mr. Englishman makee noise all time—vellee good beauty tleatment!"

"Say, you are a wow!" The sycophantic Love-in-the-Mist was doubled up with mirth by his superior officer's wit. "Ain't you just a wow, Ling! I guess if you hadn't been a torturer you'd have made a real comedian. I've heard guys on the stage not half as funny as you!"

"Me vellee funny man!" said Sung Ling. "But me not so funny as Mr. Englishman be by-and-by."

Waring was sitting up and staring at them with a face of horror.

"My God!" he said. "You can't mean it! Put that rat in the globe to eat my face! You fiends!"

"Vellee nice rat," Sung Ling extricated the rodent from Love-in-the-Mist's handkerchief and held it up for Waring to admire. "Him lil feet vellee cold. P'laps he get in Mr. Englishman's mouth and bitee tongue!"

"My God!" Waring fell back with a groan and closed his eyes. As he did so the chain clanked on the stone floor.

"Fainted," said Love-in-the-Mist. "Reckon he'll come round when the rat starts chewin' his face. Let's slip it on now, Ling."

They approached the motionless figure. Sung Ling had placed the rat in the helmet and was holding his hand over the opening to prevent it from

jumping out. Love-in-the-Mist held a lantern on high—

Neither of them knew exactly what happened. Directly they came within the circumference of the semicircle Waring had described, the toe of a heavy brogue shoe caught Love-in-the-Mist fairly on the jaw. Behind that shoe was all the power of the leg of a man who had played center three for England. He punted Love-in-the-Mist in the face as hard as ever he had punted a rugger ball. It was the deadly trick of the French *apache* and timed to perfection. It sent the Flower flying to the opposite corner of the cell with a broken neck and a dislocated jaw.

Then—so fast that it was practically a continuation of the same kick—Waring's leg whirled round and crooked itself about Sung Ling's waist. The Chinese was bowled off his feet. In a flash, the soldier, handcuffed hands and all, was on top of him, pinioning the sinuous body between his knees and forcing the point of his shoulder into the yellow throat.

Sung Ling had all the lithe strength of the Oriental, but when it came to grips with Waring—even though the Englishman's hands were handcuffed behind his back—he had no chance. He was like a kitten pinned by a bull-terrier.

For a few minutes his yellow hands tore and scratched at the face pressed against his, then the intolerable pressure as Waring's shoulder bore into his throat and Waring's knees tightened like iron clamps about his body, subdued him into immobility.

"Listen," Waring said. His lips were close to the Chinese's ear. "Listen. You've got your hands free. Take the key of those handcuffs out of your right-hand pocket—I saw you put it there—and free my hands. Be quick. If you haven't the cuffs off before I count twenty I'll choke you to death. One—two—three—"

And Sung Ling obeyed; most men would have if they'd had their throats between that shoulder and a stone floor. He found the key, passed his hands over Waring's back, and fumbled with the cuffs. Before Waring had counted seventeen his hands were free. He lifted his shoulder from Sung Ling's throat and put his hands there in its place.

"Now the ring round my neck. Get it off."

Again Sung Ling obeyed. He found another key and unfastened the patent catch that held the collar closed. The chain fell to the floor. Waring picked it up and in a second had clamped it about Sung Ling's own neck.

"Now, John," he said cheerfully, "we're going to make vellee quick change. Get out of those togs and remember that if you try to call for help I'll knock your face through the back of your dirty neck."

Again Sung Ling obeyed. Most men did obey Dick Waring when he spoke in that particular voice. Those that didn't usually regretted it.

In a few minutes the change was complete. For the first time in his life the Chinese torturer found himself in plus-fours; and for the first in his life Waring found himself in flowing Chinese garments. Sung Ling was unusually tall for a Chinese, and the chinese shirt and drawers were made of so loose a cut that the disparity in the breadth of their respective bodies was not noticeable.

Waring handcuffed Sung Ling's hands behind his back and gagged him with the late Love-in-the-Mist's handkerchief. Then he picked up the hel-

met in which he was pleased to find that the rat still crouched.

"Now, John," he said, "this vellee good beauty tleatment. Me placee helmet over face with rat inside. Mr. Chink makee muchee noise—"

The Chinese glared at him with green eyes like an infuriated cat's. But Waring was in no mood to show mercy. He had seen the deviltries that this human fiend had inflicted upon animals in the laboratory. It would be good for him to learn what torture was.

He slipped the helmet over the long, narrow head and buckled the leather strap about the yellow throat. Then he stood back and surveyed his handiwork.

"Quite the complete golfer!" he said. "My word, Sung Ling, if you turned up at St. Andrew's in that kit they'd make you captain straight away! You damned fiend! I only hope the rat eats the eyes out of your head before they find you. *One* dog has been avenged anyway—"

Rage at the thought of what he had witnessed in the laboratory choked him. He turned on his heel without another word and strode out of the cell, leaving Sung Ling—as has already been related—to be discovered by Dreen and Cheeta Ram a couple of hours later.

CHAPTER XX

No Time to Spare

AFTER that, Waring's departure from Elmgrove Hall was—in his own phraseology—as easy as picking peas. He simply walked out without attempting to conceal himself in any way. No disguise could have been simpler or more effective than the Chinese clothes. He kept his head bowed, imitated Sung Ling's catlike walk, and not one of the three Flowers whom he passed on the way dreamed of questioning his identity. Rather they avoided him. The Chinese torturer's reputation was so sinister that even his fellow gangsters kept out of his way as much as possible. So Waring found his way to the upper regions, walked boldly across the great hall, and out through the front door.

It was now late in the evening and dusk was beginning to gather. He went down the terraces and into the wood, which, although he did not know it, was the wisest thing he could have done. It was Sung Ling's custom to refresh himself by a stroll through the woods every evening when the labors of the day were over. He had a theory that ideas came to him while walking alone in the woods.

Waring went on until he was certain that he was out of sight of the house and unobserved. Then he stopped to consider the next move. Obviously he must get to Queensmarry at once. It was at Queensmarry that—so he believed—Pamela was; and it was to Queensmarry that the Strangler was being sent on his hideous mission. If Pamela, Mrs. Dreen, Mrs. Robbins and the district nurse were to be saved he, Waring, must get there as soon as possible.

The notion of going straight to the police crossed his mind, but he rejected it. They would be too slow and every minute was precious. Besides, he had no idea where the nearest police station might be. He doubted if there would be one in such a small hamlet as Elmgrove.

No—if the women were to be saved he must do it himself and he must lose no time. Later it would be the turn of the police and Dreen could be rescued. He knew the millionaire would not thank him if he delayed to search for

him now and thereby delivered Mrs. Dreen into the hands of the Strangler.

These thoughts, long as they take to relate, had only occupied a few seconds in real time. Having reached his decision, Waring lost no time in acting. He started off at a swift loping stride through the wood, going in what he judged would be a direction that would take him to Elmgrove village. There he intended to beg, borrow or steal a car that might convey him to Queensmarry.

He had not gone more than half a mile before he heard a sound that, in that lonely spot, sounded peculiarly horrible. It was the shrill, mirthless laughter of a madman. It was, although of course Waring could not know, Mr. Parker laughing at Michaelmas Daisy's head. Still less could he know that at that very moment Cheeta Ram was gliding through the wood about a quarter of a mile away intent on his, Waring's, rescue. If only they had met by some lucky chance much trouble might have been saved.

They did not meet. Not unnaturally Waring turned away from the direction whence the laughter came. He hurried on, and in a few minutes he heard the droning roar of the sacrificial drum being rubbed by Phlox. He guessed it to be a signal of sorts. Had his escape already been discovered! Spurred by that thought he broke into as fast a run as the darkness of the wood and the uneven ground would permit.

Soon the wood began to thin. A thick hedge five feet high loomed in front. He scrambled over it and found himself on a rough lane. In which direction did the village lie? He had not the faintest idea, so he tossed a coin and it told him to go to the left.

He turned to the left and ran hard for a mile, when the lane terminated in a plowed field. The coin had been wrong! He turned again and ran back, stumbling over ruts and slipping in wet mud that not even the phenomenally hot July had wholly dried.

"My luck's out," he thought to himself. "Suppose I'm too late after all! Confound that coin!"

He set his teeth and, despite the handicap of the unaccustomed Chinese garments, ran harder than ever. The thought of being too late was horrible. Presently the lane branched into another slightly better lane that might almost have merited the title of country road. Again Waring stopped uncertain of which way to go. These lanes were maddening. He might wander about them all night and accomplish nothing.

From the right came the faint barking of a dog. At once he took the right-hand turn, hoping the sound might prove to have been an indication of the position of the village. The lane had high hedges and frequent twists, so that it was impossible to see more than a hundred yards ahead at a time. Now running, now walking, Waring hurried on. Despite his iron nerve and self-control he was becoming almost frantic with impatience.

A light showed on the right. At once he scrambled over the hedge, made his way across a field where sheep were sleeping, jumped a brook and found himself in an orchard. The light proceeded from the window of a small cottage on the other side of the orchard. Waring ran to the door and knocked loudly. An elderly woman opened it, saw him, screamed and slammed it in his face. She is not to be blamed. A huge man in flowing eastern clothes with black bruises on his face down which perspiration is pouring is not the most welcome sort

of visitor to have at a lonely cottage at night.

"Go away," she called through the keyhole. "I've nothing for you. There's a man here with a gun." The last was palpably untrue.

"Listen," Waring said desperately. "I'm not a tramp. I only want to know how to get to Elmgrove village. It's a matter of life and death. For God's sake tell me and I'll go at once."

"He's got a gun," the woman shrilled. She was too demented with fear to listen to what Waring was saying. Of late there had been some sinister happenings in lonely cottages bordering on the Elmgrove Hall estates, and she feared the worst.

"Tell me how to get to the village," Waring shouted. "I must get a car at once. It's frightfully urgent."

"It's loaded," came the maddening answer.

"My God!" Waring's control was parting inch by inch. It was no time for gentle measures. He put his shoulder to the door and pressed until the bolts creaked.

"Tell me how to get to the village or I'll break the door down," he said. "Quick! Which way do I go?"

"Go back to the lane and turn to the left and keep on until you see Stivin's stile. Cross it and keep on till you hit the bridle path—that will take you straight there."

As she spoke the woman was dragging heavy pieces of furniture across the floor and piling them against the door.

"How will I know Stivin's stile?" Waring shouted. "There are dozens of 'em."

"You can't miss it," was the illuminating reply.

Waring turned with a groan and ran back across the orchard and the field where the sheep were. The incident had taken fifteen precious minutes and he was not much wiser than he was before. And he was beginning to wonder how on earth, even supposing he found the village, he was to get a car. There were only a few shillings in the pockets of Sung Ling's clothes, and—he knew this from the reception the woman in the cottage had given him—his appearance was not such as to inspire trust in a stranger's mind.

Once more he was pounding down the slippery lane. What was it that infernal woman had said? Keep on until you see Stivin's stile! You can't miss it! Confound her—why couldn't she have told him how long he was to keep on? Already he had passed several gaps in the hedge that might be stiles. What was a stile anyway? Would a low wall with a wooden step be termed a stile? Was that the stile—or that? Oh, damn the woman! He'd a good mind to go back and make her show him the way properly.

"Mental torture!" thought Waring. "This is 'way ahead of anything Sung Ling ever devised!"

If only he could see a house of some sort! He had no idea that a stretch of such lonely country could be found anywhere in the south of England. It was more like Yorkshire. But of course Mr. Harris would have selected lonely country.

Suddenly he heard footsteps coming toward him. It was an old man carrying a lantern, for, despite the rising moon, the lane was dark by reason of the overhanging trees. Waring changed his run to a quick walk. He knew that if he frightened the gaffer as he had frightened the woman by his haste it would be hopeless.

"I say," he strove to make his voice sound casual. "I say, I wonder

if you could tell me how to get to the village? I seem to have missed my way."

The old man put his hand to his ear and bent forward in a listening attitude.

"Eh?"

Deaf! Waring repeated his query at the top of his voice. As he did so he prayed that there might be no search parties of Flowers in the vicinity.

"Auh! It's the village you're wantin'? You'm be one o' they foreign gents from the 'all sure-ly. 'Ow's Mr. Harris keepin'? He wasn't in church last Sunday!"

"He's very well indeed, thank you." In his desperation Waring answered mechanically. "But what about the village. How do I get there?"

"It's the village you want?"

"Yes."

The old man put down the lantern and wiped his forehead before replying. Obviously he was not what Dreen would have termed a "live wire." He needed time.

"Well, there be two ways o' gettin' there," he said at last. "If you'm cross Stivin's stile and keep on till you hits the bridle path"

"But where is it?"

The old man looked puzzled.

"It's the village you want?"

"Stivin's stile? For God's sake—"

Waring clenched his hands in an agony of impotence. Time was flying and he was still no nearer Queensmarry. For anything he could do here to stop the Strangler he might as well have stayed in the cell in Elmgrove Hall.

"There be another way you could go," the gaffer was saying. "See that gate there? Cross it and keep straight on down till you see the great old quarry on your left. Then if you turn off sharp you'll see another gate that Mus' Sanger had put up the way the coortin' couples o' a Sunday wouldn't get trespassin' on his land. Not that they'd be doin' any harm, you know, but—"

"Quite," Waring cut in. "I go through Mr. Sanger's gate and then—"

"Eh?"

"After I get over Mr. Sanger's gate? What do I do then? Is the village near there?"

"Ay, you can't miss it surely. But if I were you I'd—"

Waring did not wait to hear what the gaffer would have done if he'd been Waring. He was off like a bolt from the blue, running as he had never run before. He might do it yet. Given a fast car he might get to Queensmarry before the emissaries of the Flower Gang.

This time he actually did find the village, but when he saw what it comprised his heart sank. It was a hamlet rather than a village; a little cluster of laborers' cottages, a post office, and public house. Waring chose the last. It was the only place that seemed in the least likely to boast such a thing as a car.

But what on earth was he to tell the proprietor? Useless to attempt to tell the truth—Mr. Harris was evidently *persona grata* among the country people, and if he, a total stranger, attempted to expose their squire's real nature they would simply think him mad. He must bluff.

He strode into the bar with a confidence he was far from feeling. The few laborers who were drinking there stared at him, smitten dumb by surprise. The stout landlady paused in her task of wiping glasses and stood open-mouthed.

"Good evening," Waring said.

"Don't be alarmed by my—er—costume. I was going to a fancy dress dance and we had an accident. You might give me a double whisky and soda, will you?" He threw down one of Sung Ling's half crowns. "And—er—what about hiring another car? I want to get back to Queensmarry if I can."

As he spoke the irrelevant thought flitted across his mind what an extraordinary affair life is. You never know what's waiting for you round the next corner. Had any one told him four days before that he would find himself in the Harris Arms—that was the name of the pub, a delicate compliment to the Squire of Elmgrove—wearing the clothes of a Chinese torturer and telling a string of lies he would have thought them mad. Yet here he was.

His manner, his voice and the mention of Queensmarry had impressed the rustics. They were inclined to laugh at his queer appearance, but they did not doubt his story.

"I don't know where you'd get a car here, sir," the landlady handed him fourpence change. "'Less perhaps you went up to the hall. Mr. Harris, you know. He's got several cars, an' he might give you the loan of one."

He might indeed! Waring could have laughed aloud at the thought of what his reception would be if he went back to the hall and asked for the loan of a car.

"Oh, I don't think I'll bother Mr. Harris, thanks," he said. "Is there no one else has a car? A motor cycle would do."

The landlady looked helpless.

"I don't know, I'm sure, sir," she said. "There's Charlie Heap, who sells gasoline. He might be able to tell you of something."

Waring put down the empty glass.

"Charlie Heap? Where is he?"

The landlady looked round the bar.

"Any one know where Charlie Heap's likely to be found?"

Half a dozen vacant faces were turned from Waring in her direction. For what seemed to Waring to be interminable hours of waiting no one spoke. At last one man volunteered.

"Ned Squirrel might know."

"And where could I find Ned Squirrel?" It was only by a miracle that Waring was able to control his voice.

"I'll show you, sir," said the man.

CHAPTER XXI

The Mad Boy

ON that same evening the green ambulance had, in accordance with Mr. Harris's orders, left Elmgrove Hall on its second trip that day to Queensmarry. As before, Virginia Creeper was driving. Inside sat Hibiscus, the Strangler, and the Strangler's keeper, Mme. Bernier. She had come at Hibiscus's urgent request. He was a pretty tough specimen, and pretty handy with an automatic, but the prospect of a tête-à-tête night drive with the Strangler had been too much for even his nerves. Hence the presence of the Frenchwoman.

They were an ill-assorted trio. Mme. Bernier was dressed in the very latest Paris style; Hibiscus was attired like the Buenos Aires flashy crook he was, and the Strangler, for some obscure reason, affected clothes that were half military and half sporting. An immense cap was cocked at a jaunty angle over one eye, and his emaciated nether limbs were clothed in leggings and riding breeches. His hairy hands were never still for an instant, for he was excited at the prospect of strangling two women on the same night.

"There'll be han horgy Saturday night," Hibiscus suddenly broke the silence.

"Zen I 'ope ze ghost stays away," Mme. Bernier said. "Ah—he ees terrible, that one. Somethings must be done or I shall not stay."

"Ghost! Wot d'yer mean? There ain't no ghost in the 'all that I knows of."

Mme. Bernier shrugged her shoulders.

"Zat ees what they all zay. I tell them I see a tall figure in white outside ze door of ze laboratory and they laugh. 'E was not one of ze Flowers —I nevaire see 'im before—and yet I know zat 'e ees in ze 'ouse. Three times I see 'im and each time 'e slip away quite quiet and I cannot see where 'e go. Ze 'ouse ees 'aunted. I know it. If somethings ees not done soon I shall depart. I 'ave told Mistaire 'Arris."

"An' wot did 'e say?"

Again Mme. Bernier shrugged her shoulders.

"What does 'e ever say, that one? He looks with hees eyes and zen I 'ave no more courage. It ees always like that!"

Hibiscus chuckled and dug the Strangler playfully in the ribs. The degenerate appeared to resent the familiarity for a hand like a darting tarantula came out of the dark and fastened on Hibiscus's throat. It did not choke him, but when in a sort of spasm of disgust he tried to remove it he found he couldn't. There was abnormal strength in those long, thin arms.

"'Ere!" he said after a minute's futile pulling. "Take your 'and away, old chappie. It ain't me yer to strangle, yer know. Take it away, do you 'ear? Madame, tell 'im to take it away."

"It ees no good my speaking to 'im," Mme. Bernier said. "'E 'ees very strong willed. It 'ees better if you just sit quite still and do nothing at all . . . Now 'e 'ave ze other hand on my neck, but I do not care. It 'ees only play."

"Only 'ope 'e won't get too bloody funny," Hibiscus growled. "If 'e tries to strangle *me* I'll put a bullet through 'is 'eart—chief or no chief."

As he spoke Hibiscus felt for his automatic. He was no coward, but he had an inborn horror of the Strangler. The touch of that hand on his throat sent cold chills down his spine. Mme. Bernier, however, did not appear to mind. She sat quite still and the ambulance purred on through the darkness.

"Gawd!" Hibiscus said suddenly. There was a note of panic in the exclamation.

"What ees it now?" the Frenchwoman asked.

"My gun. I forgot ter load it! There's bullets in the locker under the seat, but I can't get at 'em . . . Now, laddie, let yer old uncle go for a minute, won't yer? Ah, do now . . ."

The last sentences were addressed in a wheedling voice to the Strangler. The imbecile took no notice. He was sitting between Mme. Bernier and Hibiscus, and had a hand upon the throat of each. He was making a queer, crooning sound to himself.

Mme. Bernier had gone white. She slipped her hand inside the bosom of her dress where reposed a long, sharp knife with an ivory handle. She had never known her charge to behave like this before, and she scented danger.

"Tell us of 'ow you keel Cecille Robinet in Marseilles," she suggested. "It ees a very good story. It made Monsieur le Judge faint in ze court."

But the Strangler declined to tell

any story. He was smiling under the great cap, a queer, sinister little smile. And all the time the grip of his hands was slowly, imperceptibly tightening—

The ambulance had by now turned off the South West Arterial and was bumping down a lane very similar to those that intersected the Elmgrove woods. Virginia Creeper was driving this way so that he might avoid having to go up the Queensmarry Avenue. The Queensmarry woods were almost as lonely as those at Elmgrove Hall. It was a vast estate, but badly kept up for old Lady Queensmarry, the present owner, was inclined to be on the mean side.

Virginia Creeper had lowered the lights and they crept along with as little noise as possible. Presently he saw the distant glimmer of a lamp through the thinning trees. It was the light of Mrs. Robbins's cottage. He switched off the engine and let the ambulance coast down a gentle incline.

It was at that moment that Hibiscus's nerve suddenly gave. He clubbed his automatic and struck the Strangler over the head, intending to stun and not kill.

That was a mistake. The blow did not stun the imbecile, but it aroused him to sudden maniacal fury. His hands tightened until the long fingers cut like wire into the necks they held. He gave little jabbering cries like an angry monkey and forced his victims forward with irresistible strength until they were in a kneeling position upon the floor.

Mme. Bernier had drawn her knife and was striking blindly. Hibiscus rained blows, but the automatic was too light to do any real damage. In a few minutes he and Mme. Bernier were lying motionless and face downward upon the floor of the ambulance —the same floor on which Polyanthus had squirmed to death that morning—and the Strangler was kneeling on top, a bony knee on each. Nor did he release them until life was quite extinct. Even then he did not rise. He remained crouching upon the bodies like some monstrous, sprawling spider. What strange thought processes were going on in the tiny head I cannot say.

At the bottom of the incline Virginia Creeper, who judged it too risky to restart the engine, allowed the ambulance to come to a gradual standstill. Then he turned, opened the aperture behind his back, and called softly into the darkness.

"'Ere we are, Hibby. Tell the Strangler to get 'is 'ands ready. The cottage is about two 'undred yards from 'ere."

There was no answer save a low, crooning or humming sound such as some great insect might make.

"Sleepin'!" said Virginia Creeper to himself and grinned.

He climbed out of the driver's seat, took a flash light, went round to the back of the ambulance and pulled back the sliding doors.

"Come on, Hibby . . . Wake up, madame . . . Oh, Gawd!"

The light of the flash lamp had revealed the two motionless bodies and the sprawling horror on top. Virginia Creeper did not need to be told what had happened. The Strangler had developed one of his murdering fits during which he was more dangerous than any wild animal.

With a yell of inarticulate terror the wretched Flower sprang back and began to run madly up the incline down which they had just coasted. He was a powerful enough fellow, but he was unarmed, and he knew that a hand-to-hand encounter with the Strangler

could have only one ending. He set his teeth and ran for dear life.

At the top of the incline he stopped and looked back. It was as though he looked down a long tunnel, full of queer shadows and splashes of snow where the moonlight fell through the overhanging branches. At the far end of the tunnel a black monster with one glaring red eye crouched. That was the ambulance with its rear lamp still lit. For a moment he thought he was not pursued; then, grotesque and horrible, like the daddy longlegs of a nightmare, writhing rather than running, seeming as if jerked along by his own clutching hands, came the Strangler.

Virginia Creeper turned to run, realized the futility, turned and met the monster with a running kick. He missed, staggered and fell. Instantly the hands drifted to his throat. The Strangler's childish, ageless face smiled into his.

When it was over the Strangler released his hands with some difficulty. He looked round and the light of Mrs. Robbins's cottage, which was shining redly through the trees, caught his eye. He stared at it for a few minutes like a meditative spider. Then, without a backward glance at Virginia Creeper's convulsed face, he rose and made his way toward it, dodging through the trees at a queer, shuffling gait, his hands fluttering and dancing in front like butterflies secured by threads.

He was not the only thing that moved in the Queensmarry woods that night. As he crossed one of the tiny paths that wound through the trees he heard a low murmur of voices. He stood still in the shadow of an elm, and two tall dark figures, carrying between them, on a stretcher, something that looked like a corpse wrapped in white, passed before him. Talking to one another in voices scarcely above a whisper, they passed on with their sinister burden and disappeared among the trees.

The Strangler waited until they were gone and then continued on his way to the cottage. His hands led him across the tiny garden with the strawberry canes, among which Cheeta Ram had crouched that morning. At the window of the room where the lamp was he stopped and peered through the aperture between the partially drawn curtains.

Old Mrs. Robbins and Miss Raeburn, the Scotch district nurse, were gossiping over a little fire of sticks and peat which, despite the warmth of the night, Mrs. Robbins had lighted for what she called the sake of company. An hour before the nurse had seen Mrs. Dreen, who was now on the road to recovery, fall into a comfortable sleep. She had recovered consciousness that afternoon, and old Dr. Duke, who had paid a belated visit in the evening, had expressed himself as being well satisfied with her progress. He had listened with some surprise to Miss Raeburn's account of Sir William Moresby's visit in the morning, and had complimented her on refusing to hand over the patient.

"Most extraordinary thing I ever heard of," he had said. "Quite contrary to all medical etiquette. Those fellows that call themselves specialists are too big for their boots. Coming again, is he? I'll tell him what *I* think about it."

But it was not of that that Mrs. Robbins and Miss Raeburn were now talking. They were discussing the unexplained failure of Lady Pamela to return to dinner after promising her aunt she would do so. It was not like

Lady Pamela to break her word. If anything had prevented her coming back, surely she would have phoned or wired an explanation! Could there have been an accident? Another queer thing was that young Mr. Hennigan was also missing. His mother, an old friend and distant connection of Lady Queensmarry, had telephoned to ask if by any chance he could have gone down to Queensmarry and had been informed by Dyson, the butler, he had not.

"It's all the fault of those dratted motor cars," Mrs. Robbins declared. "Nasty stinking things! The poor lamb's had a breakdown somewhere—depend upon it. Likely she's down on her hands and knees tinkering with the innards of the thing at this very minute, and her without a bite to eat!"

"I think she should be able to get a meal somewhere," said Miss Raeburn in her prim Scotch voice. "But it's been a verra queer day altogether. Firrist the wee specialist comin' and then the young lady losin' herrself. I wonder what will happen next."

"They do say troubles never come singly," said Mrs. Robbins, and sighed.

Then there came a gentle, almost timid tap against the cottage door. It could hardly be described as a tap at all; it was made like the brushing of a branch or the fluttering of some little bird. Three times it was repeated before it attracted the district nurse's notice. Mrs. Robbins, who was deaf, had heard nothing.

"I'm thinkin' there's some one outside," said the nurse, and rose and went to the door.

Outside stood what seemed in the moonlight to be a tall, thin youth, with an immense peaked cap pulled down over his face. By his eyes and the fluttering movements of his hands the nurse saw at once that he was a mental deficient. But she was not in the least afraid of imbeciles. Experience had taught her that if they were managed in the right way they were quite harmless. She had once nursed a member of Parliament who fancied himself a lobster and had managed him wonderfully for two years.

She turned to Mrs. Robbins.

"It's a puir young lad, and I'm thinkin' he's a bit daft by the look of him. Maybe he's run away from some home and got lost in the woods."

Old Mrs. Robbins tottered to the door and inspected the Strangler.

"He's no one from these parts," she said. "Come in, boy, and tell us where you belong. Is it Tunbridge Wells you've come from?"

"Cecille Robinet . . . *comme ça,*" said the Strangler and gesticulated, Then he shambled across the threshold and stood smiling and mouthing in the tiny living room.

Old Mrs. Robbins, who was slightly blind as well as deaf, had noticed nothing peculiar in the visitor's appearance, but the district nurse's quick eyes had been caught by the hairy fluttering hands. They were caked with some dark, sticky stuff that glistened dully. She looked hard in the Strangler's face, and read there slow bestial ferocity, worse than any ordinary madness, that made her blood run cold.

Miss Raeburn was a brave woman. Although she saw at once that she had to deal with a homicidal lunatic whose hands at that very moment were reeking with the blood of some victim, she did not lose her head for an instant. Quickly she glanced round for a weapon. The poker which had been stuck in the fire and was red-hot, caught her eye. She moved across the room and lifted it casually.

"Mrs. Robbins," she said, "I'm thinkin' you'd better be goin' up to the hoose to see if the medicine Dr. Duke promised has been left there by mistake. I'd go meself only I'm afraid to leave Mrs. Dreen. And if you see Mr. Dyson you micht tell him aboot this lad. Ask him to come down here."

But old Mrs. Robbins resented being sent to fetch the medicine. She liked the nurse, but thought she was inclined to be "bossy" at times.

"Mr. Dyson will send it down all right when it comes," she said. "Sit down, lad, and warm yourself . . . 'Ullo!"

She ended with a nervous laugh. One of the Strangler's hands was drifting toward her wrinkled throat. She brushed it away as one might brush away a wasp.

"What have you got on your hands, lad? 'Ere . . . !"

"Mrs. Robbins"—there was sharp command in Miss Raeburn's voice—"don't let him touch you. He's quite mad, and very dangerous. Get behind me."

As she spoke she seized the old woman's arm and pulled her into the corner. Then she stood in front of her with the glowing poker raised above her head.

"Don't come over here," she said to the Strangler. "I'll hit you with this if you do. Stay over there."

"Virginia Creeper . . . *comme ça,*" smiled the Strangler. He came sidling toward them with a curious, crablike gait. His shoulders were hunched, his tiny head was thrust forward, and his hands were opening and shutting like the beaks of two hungry birds.

"Scream," said Miss Raeburn. "With me. Now . . . Help . . . Help . . . Help . . ."

They screamed in unison, but there was no reply save the distant yap of some poaching dog. And from the room where Mrs. Dreen lay no sound came.

CHAPTER XXII

A Night of Horror

THE name of the man who had volunteered in the bar of the Harris Arms to show Waring where Ned Squirrel was was Teel. Teel was an out of work laborer, and he had made the offer because he judged Waring, because his eccentric clothes, to belong to the tipping classes. But, alas for good intentions, he was—to say the least of it—rather the worse for beer. Before they had gone twenty yards from the Harris Arms, he forgot all about Ned Squirrel and began to sing. It was the inevitable effect of fresh night air coming on the top of many pints.

Waring stopped and laid a hand on his arm. The time for trifling was over. He meant to get to Queensmarry if he had to fight half Elmgrove village first.

"Stop that," he said sharply. "I'm in a desperate hurry. Show me where Squirrel lives."

Teel's answer was to put up his fists.

"Wanter fight? Who are you getting at? . . . Ow!"

The last was an exclamation of pain. Waring's hand had tightened about his biceps. As Dreen had remarked, he had not got a three-hundred-pound grip for nothing.

"Ned Squirrel," he said warningly.

"I'll show yer, sir," Teel said suddenly becoming sober. "That's 'is 'ouse on the right. The one with the lamp. Is that all now, sir?"

"You come with me," Waring said. He was not going to take any more chances.

On inquiry it proved that the house Teel had indicated really was Ned Squirrel's, but Ned Squirrel himself was not at home. Mrs. Squirrel supplied this information from an upper window. Had Waring been a less controlled man he must have done something desperate at this fresh set-back. It seemed as though a spiteful Providence was putting every possible obstacle in the way to prevent his reaching Queensmarry that night.

"Could you tell me where he's gone?" he asked Mrs. Squirrel.

"I couldn't say at all," was the answer. "He might have gone to Gunter's or he might be down at the Quarry Farm with Mus' Sanger . . . Could you leave a message?"

"Could you tell where Charlie Heap is?" Teel cut in. "This ge'man's lookin' for a car in a hurry. . . Yer don't know where Charlie'd be likely to be?"

Mrs. Squirrel leaned farther from the window.

"Is that Charlie Teel speakin'?"

Waring felt a salt taste in his mouth. He had bitten through his lip in his impatience. He had imagined that only people in books did that.

"Who else 'd it be?" Charlie Teel was evidently regarded as a wit in the district. He was ogling Mrs. Squirrel with a beery leer that Waring found extremely irritating.

"And it's Charlie Heap you want?" Mrs. Squirrel called.

"*I* don'," Teel said. "It's this ge'man wants him. He wants a car."

"For God's sake . . ." Waring muttered. He was beginning to wonder if these people were all in league to delay him. Surely nobody could be so slow, except on purpose! Perhaps they were in Mr. Harris's pay!

"But I thought Charlie'd handed the store over to Fred," Mrs. Squirrel was saying. "He'd too much on his hands with the carting business and all . . ."

"Auh, carting!" Teel spat to show his contempt of that trade. "I'm thinkin' if he'd stayed in the cartin' . . ."

Waring laid a not too gentle hand on his shoulder.

"Don't you — can't you — realize I'm in a desperate hurry?" he said. "Where is this man Heap likely to be? Show me his house."

"Keep your 'ands to yourself," Teel said sulkily. "Ain't I tryin' to help you? If you want to know that's 'is 'ouse just across the road, but he won't be there. Likely enough he—"

Waring did not wait to hear the rest. He released Teel's shoulder and dashed across to the house indicated. Sure enough there was a small wooden shed with a corrugated iron roof that from the fact that there were empty gasoline tins lying about the door might be deduced to be a garage of sorts. Waring tried the door and found it locked. He looked round, caught up a handy billet of wood, and with one blow smashed the lock. Eagerly he peered inside. The shed was empty.

"What d'yer think yer doin'?" Teel, angry and expostulating, had joined him. "Can't go smashin' folks' property even if you do want a car in a 'urry. Ten bob—that job 'll be. An' look 'ere, mister . . ."

Waring put a hand on his shoulder.

"I'd be quiet if I were you," he said very politely, and looked Teel in the eyes. The laborer turned as white

as a sheet and stood motionless. He was a stupid man, but not too stupid to recognize sudden death when it stared him in the face.

Waring went back into the shed and looked round. It was not empty as he had at first supposed. Leaning against the wall, half hidden behind the door, there was a decrepit motor cycle. He wheeled it out into the moonlight and made rapid examination. Gasoline? . . . Oil? . . . Tires? Yes, the thing appeared to be in running condition.

Regardless of Teel, who was watching open-mouthed and not daring to say a word, he jumped on the starter. No result.

He tried again, and at the fourth essay the engine jumped into healthy life. No music he had ever heard had been sweeter to his ears than that *perr-um . . . perr-um . . . perr-um.*

"You're right now," said Teel, who had become infected with something of Waring's anxiety. "Off ye go, sir, and good luck."

"Thanks," Waring shouted, and in a moment he was flying through Elmgrove village.

It was heavenly to be in swift motion at last after the irritating delays. As the engine warmed up the old crock began to run as if fresh from the works. By the time the South West Arterial was reached it was doing a steady forty-five.

Waring's mind was in a ferment. Would he be in time or not? What would he find when he arrived at Queensmarry? He hardly dared to think. Pamela, Mrs. Robbins, Mrs. Dreen! Would he be in time?

He opened the throttle to its widest extent and the motor cycle fairly roared down the clear road. Hedges, telegraph poles and trees rushed past in a confused blur. In the moonlight the road lay like a white ribbon. Faster . . . Faster . . . Faster . . .

Already he was within the boundary of the vast Queensmarry estate. The woods were closing round on either side and in the distance, silhouetted against the star-spangled sky, rose the towers of Queensmarry House.

"We'll do him yet, Pam!" he was hardly conscious of having shouted the words aloud. Hope had taken the place of despair. There was something intoxicating in this mad rush through the night.

"*Gerr-umph,*" said the engine, spluttered and stopped. The strain had been too great for its aged heart. Like a gallant steed it had done its best, but now it could do no more.

Waring tried to restart it and failed. This time it was carburetor trouble that would have taken the best part of an hour to repair. He flung the machine into a ditch and started down the road, running and walking alternately. Then he came to a stile leading to a path through the woods which he knew would take him to the house by a shorter route than the long avenue. He climbed over and began to run down the path.

Three hundred yards brought him to where the path joined a broader ride used, he remembered, by men carting timber. Presently it sloped downward, and he found himself looking down a long tunnel full of queer shadows and splashes of moonlight. At the far end of the tunnel the rear lamp of a car seemed like an evil red eye.

He started to run toward it when his eye was caught by a huddled shape lying across the path. It was the body of a young man. His swollen tongue lolled from his mouth, his eyes were bulging, and his face black with con-

gested blood. The cause of death was obvious. He had been strangled.

Waring did not delay to make a long examination. One glance at the man's throat had told him all he wanted to know. It was the Strangler's work.

He approached the car at the bottom of the incline with caution. Hearing no sound of voices he went nearer and recognized the green ambulance from which he had taken Mrs. Dreen. The sliding door at the back was open, and, peering inside, he could dimly discern two huddled forms lying upon the floor. One was the body of a big woman in fashionable clothes; the other was the body of a man in cheap flashy garments of foreign cut. They also had been strangled. Their swollen faces were unrecognizable, but he guessed the big woman to be the one that had conducted the Strangler into Mr. Harris's presence that afternoon.

The biters bit! Waring saw at once what had happened. These three dead people were members of the Flower Gang who had been detailed to accompany the Strangler on his ghastly mission and to bring back Mrs. Dreen. Without a doubt there had been a quarrel of some sort and they had suffered the very fate they had planned to inflict upon others.

But where was the fourth and most formidable member of the party? Where was the Strangler himself? At the thought of the creature roaming loose in these woods, with their scattered, isolated cottages, Waring's blood ran cold. At all costs he must be hunted down and killed or captured like a wild animal. There must be a search party sent out at once. Some one must go round and warn all the people.

With these thoughts racing through his mind, Waring jumped out of the ambulance. As he did so he fancied he heard a faint cry. He stopped and listened. Again it came—the cry of a woman in an extremity of fear.

"Help! Help! Help!"

"Coming," Waring shouted, and started running his hardest in the direction whence it seemed to come.

In the tiny sitting room of Mrs. Robbins's cottage a grim game was being played. The players were the Strangler and the district nurse, and the forfeit was her life and the life of old Mrs. Robbins. She had fought gallantly, but the end was very near.

For some time—how long she could not have said, but it had seemed an eternity—she had kept him at bay with a glowing poker. He had seemed afraid of the red-hot iron, even as an animal might have been afraid. He had drawn back whimpering and had crouched upon the table in the center of the room.

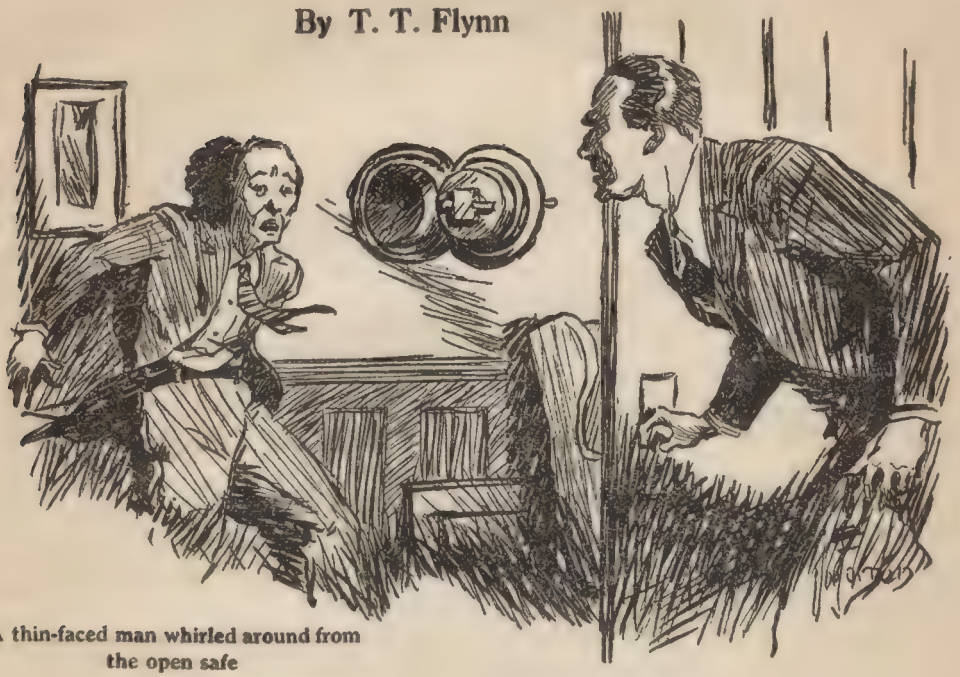
During this breathing space the women never once ceased to scream for help. Old Mrs. Robbins, mercifully for her, hardly realized what was happening, but in obedience to Miss Raeburn's prompting she raised her voice in their quavering cries. They shrieked until they were hoarse, but in that lonely place the chances against their being heard were about a hundred to one. The great house itself was more than half a mile distant and the nearest cottage, one that had belonged to a gamekeeper, was empty.

Soon the end of the poker grew cold and dulled. The Strangler dropped from the table onto the floor and once more came sidling toward them, with hands outstretched. He made no sound saving a low crooning noise. His tiny mouth was stretched in a mirthless grin and saliva dribbled from his lips.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Left-Handed Justice

By T. T. Flynn



A thin-faced man whirled around from the open safe

His Orders Were to Grope in a Darkened Room, Find a Man He Could Not See, and Kill Him

IT was another six million share day. In New York, the floor of the Stock Exchange was a seething, rolling mass of humanity. Brokers who had long ago made their million, pushed and shouted and gestured, wrote feverishly on memorandum pages, perspired, and worked harder than the servants who staffed their houses.

The overworked ticker was an hour behind. Shares changed hands in great blocks—and as the whole list dropped and dropped, the wave of selling orders from every part of the country rose in a mighty tide.

Men who had piled up fat paper profits in the long general rise, and laughed scornfully at the warning signals put out by wiser and cooler heads, suddenly grew panic stricken as they saw the bottom dropping out of the whole market. With panic they lost their reason—and with their reason their whole profits and much besides. The suckers and the wise boys were shorn alike.

The brokerage office of Fillgate, Dunne and Company reflected in a smaller way the confusion that gripped the Exchange. The board room was crowded with tense, taut customers. A few wore smiles of satisfaction and complacency. The majority were pale

and harried looking. Some appeared positively ghastly. They stared feverishly at the quotations that were chalked up, erased, and chalked up again by the weary board boys. Now and then one uttered a groan and staggered out. Others took it more quietly, but left with the air of drowning persons.

In the private office of Rufus Fillgate, senior partner, there was quiet. Little of the noise from the board room or the street outside entered there. But with the quiet there was not peace.

Rufus Fillgate stood by his private ticker, scanning the tape as it inched out with its cold impersonal tale. The man's large stocky form was sagging, as if it bore a great burden. His head was hunched forward over the tape; his teeth gnawed nervously on his thick lips. A scowl darkened his already gross face.

The quotation he was looking for appeared. His prominent jaw tightened. He dropped the tape with a muttered curse and went back to work. Only to return presently and again find that there had been no rally in the stock he was interested in.

So it went that long afternoon. Work and watch the ticker—and when it had clicked out its last message for the day, Rufus Fillgate was not the man he had been that morning. Something had appeared in his bearing and in his eyes that made him kin to many who had slunk out of the board room not so many yards away.

Marvin Dunne noticed it as they had a last talk before parting for the night.

"What's the matter, Rufus, old man?" he asked in his jovial, open-hearted manner. "You look fagged out. Worse than that. Haven't been foolish and got pinched in the market yourself have you?"

Fillgate managed a smile. "Do I look that big a fool?" he asked.

Marvin Dunne chuckled. "Of course not. But seriously, you do look like you've been through a laundry mangle. I feel the same way. To-morrow is Saturday. We ought to get cleaned up at a fairly reasonable hour. Suppose we both fly up to my shore place in Connecticut? A bit of a week end will do us both good. Relaxation, change of scene, and all that. What do you say?"

Fillgate thought a moment, and then nodded. "All right. Suits me. But there's enough work here to last over Sunday."

"We'll take a couple of secretaries along."

"Good."

Marvin Dunne got to the door on his way out, and then turned at a sudden thought. "By the way, I paid the premiums on our insurance policies today. They're all right for another six months."

Fillgate's eyes gleamed suddenly. He veiled them and nodded silently, as if, right at the moment, the policies held little interest for him. Each carried enough on the other's life, to enable him to buy the other's share in the business in case of sudden death. It was one of the far-sighted aspects of modern business. Right now, however, Rufus Fillgate needed ready cash.

The matter was heavy on his mind as he let himself silently into his sumptuous Park Avenue bachelor apartment. He walked across the thick rugs with practically noiseless steps, and on sudden thought went straight back to the door of his den and home office to get a cigar from that room.

As the door opened without prior warning, a thin, sallow-faced man whirled away from the open door of a

small wall safe in the opposite wall, and stared with dropping jaw. One hand had gone behind him as he turned, and held something there out of sight.

II

RUFUS FILLGATE stopped inside the door and eyed the other. The silence that came between them was heavy and dramatic. Fillgate's eyes traveled from the wall safe and the picture that had been swung aside to uncover it, to the tired looking man who faced him. His thick lips parted in a sneer as he said:

"Well, Twitty—I didn't know you had the combination of that safe."

Twitty's face was haunted with a great fear. He moistened his lips with the end of his tongue. "I—I," he got out in thin tones—and then lost his voice and merely nodded.

Fillgate closed the door behind him softly. There was something menacing in that act; something cruel in the deliberate way he did it.

"Now," he said bitingly as he advanced toward Twitty, "let's see what you're hiding behind you."

Slowly Twitty brought his hand out. It held a thin sheaf of bills, none less than fifty dollars in denomination. He laid them in Fillgate's outstretched hand.

The stocky broker leaved through them, and then stepped to the safe and opened the door and peered in. He reached in next, felt around, and drew his hand out, empty.

"Where is the rest of it?" he demanded, wheeling around.

Twitty gulped, whispered huskily: "I—I—*gone.*" He shivered slightly.

There was an ebony table a few feet from them. Spread out on it was a late edition of one of the newspapers, opened at the stock reports.

Fillgate saw it, stepped over, and scanned the page. One stock was checked. It had dropped perhaps the farthest in that long, mad day, just as, not long before, it had been one of the leaders, making people rich overnight.

Fillgate's tones were cold and level as he stared at the smaller man and spoke bitingly. "So—you were playing the market, and used my money to protect your margins." It was a statement, not a question.

Twitty nodded dumbly.

Fillgate eyed him as a cat might eye a mouse writhing under its paws. And into his eyes there crept a thoughtful look. A look that swiftly deepened into grim ruthless purpose.

"Twitty!" he rasped harshly.

"Yes—yes sir."

"Do you know what the penalty for a theft like this is?"

"Oh my God, yes!" Twitty gasped, his thin features twitching.

Fillgate jabbed a thick forefinger at him. "Do you know how many years they will send you to prison under the strict new laws that apply in this State?"

"Are you going to send me to prison, Mr. Fillgate?" Twitty burst out fearfully.

The thick forefinger jabbed at him again.

"Do you know how many years you'll rot behind stone walls? How many hard days you'll work in the prison shops? How many long nights you'll lay on a hard bed and count the days, the hours before you'll get out again?"

Twitty shrank under those cruel, searing pictures. His face blanched to a corpse-like hue. For a moment it almost seemed that he would go down on his knees.

"For God's sake, Mr. Fillgate, don't send me to prison!" he begged wildly. "I put all my savings in the market. When the stock went up I borrowed and bought more. I thought I was going to get rich. My wife is in a Western sanitarium slowly dying. I haven't seen her for three years. You know it. I thought I was going to make enough to retire, and go out there to her, and give her luxuries in her last years. Be with her anyway. Then the bottom dropped out of the market! It all went, the money, the dreams, the hopes. All my savings and what I borrowed. It was my wife, Mr. Fillgate. Ah, God, when I thought of her I forgot everything else. I love her so! I knew the combination of your wall safe. I had never opened it. But to-day, this morning, I borrowed a little. Just enough to cover my margins. It didn't seem the market could go down very far. It had been going up so long. But it went down and down. I had to take more. I was—"

"You were stealing my money to bolster up your own fool judgment!" Fillgate broke in with savage sarcasm.

"I didn't mean it that way! Please, for God's sake, don't send me to prison! Think of my poor wife. She will *die*. I'll do anything for you! *Anything!* Just give me enough to keep her out there, and enough to live on, and I'll slave for you the rest of my life. As God is my witness I will. You are a rich man. What I took won't hurt you. I—I—" Twitty's voice broke, and he sobbed aloud. The terrible, heart-shaking sobs of a man in mortal agony. And a wise judge of human nature would have seen that the agony was for his wife and not himself.

Fillgate eyed him unfeelingly—and calculatingly.

"You'd do anything for me?"

"*Anything.* I swear it!" Twitty gulped and snatched at that thin straw of hope. "I'll be your slave."

III

FILLGATE waited deliberately, and when the silence had done its work on Twitty, waiting so fearfully there, said curtly:

"I'm going up to Connecticut over Saturday night and Sunday, to Dunne's place. You're to go with me and do any secretarial work I need. I'll give you my answer there. Meantime, think about the prison you may go to. And don't try to get away. I'll have you hunted down if it takes years."

Twitty nodded brokenly.

"Now then go over to the typewriter there and write and sign a full confession of what you have done."

Twitty went over and wrote like a man moving in his sleep. He signed the paper jerkily with his left hand and brought it over.

Fillgate scanned it, folded it, and slipped it in his inside coat pocket.

"I'll keep this," he said meaningly, "in case you try to wriggle out. The District Attorney's office will find it interesting reading. They're always anxious for convictions to boost their record."

Twitty listened in frozen silence.

"I have something else for you to do," Fillgate told him.

"Yes sir."

The broker stripped two fifty dollar bills from the sheaf he had taken from Twitty, and handed them over.

"Go down on the East side and buy a second-hand revolver and a silencer for it at some pawnshop. If you can't get them to-night, try the first thing in the morning. Don't give your right name and address if you are asked for them. Say nothing to any one. You

might mention, if the pawnbroker asks for anything, that you want to do some target practice in your home without arousing the neighbors. Do you understand?"

"Yes sir."

"And you might as well forget about your stocks," Fillgate advised roughly. "You're wiped out like thousands of others over the country."

"Isn't—isn't there any hope at all?" Twitty faltered.

"Not the slightest. You were a fool. Now get on your way about that gun."

Twitty got.

Fillgate secured his cigar, lighted it with fingers that were not quite steady, and sat down with a scowl of deep thought on his somewhat gross face.

IV

THE next day, Saturday, passed with the market still on its downward sag. In the late afternoon, Fillgate and Dunne, leaving their weary office force still struggling with the books, took off from Long Island in a large seaplane they had chartered.

With them, in the comfortable inclosed cabin, went Twitty and a man named Jones who was Dunne's private secretary in the office. Jones was a neatly turned out, youthful-old man who was a good secretary and would never be anything else.

In the cabin also went luggage, portable typewriters, and brief cases filled with papers.

The partners scanned and digested letters and reports on the way.

Fillgate looked even worse than he had the day before.

Twitty was a pitiful sight if one thought to look beneath the frozen mask that he presented to the world. In his private bag was the revolver and silencer that he had purchased at an obscure pawnshop in a dingy back street.

Dunne's country place was on the shore of a little placid cove where the fishing was good and the boating delightful. Part of each summer Mrs. Dunne lived there with her two children.

The house itself was a rambling old one-story stone structure set in the midst of a huge green lawn, with trees and shrubbery and flower beds all about. There was a boathouse at the edge of the cove, and a little landing there.

The seaplane took them to the landing, where Mrs. Dunne, the children, and several guests were waiting. The whole party went on up to the house, laughing, talking.

Fillgate was assigned the room he usually had when coming to this house, in the north wing, across from Marvin Dunne's room. Dunne had his own room separate from his wife's, communicating with hers by a connecting door.

Twitty and Jones were assigned rooms in the west wing.

The newcomers were left in their rooms to clean up and dress for dinner. Dusk was then falling over the countryside.

Fillgate made a hurried toilet and then left his room and went to Twitty's room in the west wing. He opened the door without knocking and went in. Twitty was donning a clean collar. He turned from the mirror with a startled movement and eyed his employer with wide, haunted eyes.

Fillgate advanced until his large form towered over the smaller one of Twitty. The secretary shrank back against the edge of the bureau behind him.

Fillgate glowered down at him, and

then demanded abruptly: "Did you bring the gun and silencer all right?" He pitched his voice low, so a person outside the room would stand no chance of understanding his words.

Twitty nodded.

"Have you been thinking about prison and that wife of yours?"

Twitty nodded again, and gulped.

"There is one hope for you to stay out of prison and care for her."

And as before, the trapped, harried secretary seized at the thin straw of hope. "What is it?" he brought out eagerly.

In low, deliberate tones, Fillgate told him. "After dinner we'll take a boat ride. When we come back, you slip into Dunne's room and ransack it as if a burglar had been in there. Open the window to show how he got in and out. Understand?"

Twitty's eyes opened wider as he listened. Amazement, concern, apprehension, appeared in turn on his thin face.

"What f-for?" he faltered.

"Because," Fillgate told him coldly, "you will wait in that dark room with the revolver and the silencer. When Dunne comes in, you will shoot him. Kill him. And then go out the window, throw the gun in the cove, and return to your room."

"My God, *no!*" Twitty protested in horror. "Not *that*. You're joking with me, Mr. Fillgate!"

"Am I? Does this look like a joke?" Fillgate jerked the signed confession from his inside coat pocket and thrust it under Twitty's nose. "Does it?" he growled.

"N-no."

"By heavens it *isn't*. I took you at your word when you said you'd do *anything* for me. Now you'll do it, or I'll send you up for the longest term it is possible to get the judge to impose. Do you understand? D'you know what it 'll mean to your wife?"

Twitty's soul was being ground between the stones of fate. Fillgate on one side; his wife and prison on the other. It was more than he could stand. Shaken, broken, he nodded. "*Anything*, if you won't use that confession, Mr. Fillgate."

"Do as I tell you, and I won't. Get that gun and put it together. And then wipe it off and wear your gloves when you handle it again."

Twitty's hands were shaking so that he made ill shift of fitting the silencer on the end of the revolver. Fillgate uttered a low oath, snatched it away, and did the job himself. Then carefully wiped all marks off with his handkerchief.

"Now then!" he snapped, throwing the gun on the bed. "There it is! Did you bring that little flash light I told you to?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. We're going down to eat in a few minutes. Pull yourself together. Act natural, or I may change my mind and send you up instead of giving you this chance to clear yourself. Remember—we'll go out after dinner. When we return, you slip into Dunne's room."

Twitty had never been in the house before. He asked unsteadily: "Which is it?"

"In the north wing. The third door on the right."

Twitty blinked. "You mean—you mean—"

"The side that you write on, *fool!* The third door on that side as you go down the hall. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," Twitty mumbled, trying to collect his chaotic thoughts.

"Now get a grip on yourself and don't make a slip. I'll be watching

you. If you mess things up or fail me, I'll send you up. And no word of yours will be believed in view of this confession." He jerked it out, shook it threateningly at the smaller man, and then left the room.

Twitty dragged forth a handkerchief, wiped his face, and finished dressing with fumbling movements. It seemed like a horrible dream. A dream that he had to go through with at all costs.

V

DINNER went off successfully. Marvin Dunne was feeling good. He led the conversation, laughing heartily at the sallies that passed back and forth, making himself the perfect, genial host. Fillgate laughed also, and carried his share of the talk. His rather gross face was almost pleasant at times, hiding successfully the tension underneath.

Twitty also managed to appear fairly natural. The knowledge that Fillgate was watching him covertly from the other end of the table drove him to. He spoke little; but then neither did Jones. They were eating at the table with their employers, but they were not expected to act quite like the other guests.

After dinner Fillgate suggested a boat ride on the smooth waters of the cove. Dunne was willing. In a few minutes the whole group was on the way to the boathouse. Twitty and Jones stayed behind.

"I think I'll go to my room and get busy on my work," Twitty said to Jones.

And Jones sighed. "Guess I better had, too. Maybe, if we work hard this evening, we'll have to-morrow off. Darn this overtime work anyway. I hate it."

"So do I!" Twitty agreed fervently.

Thereafter the two men worked in their respective rooms, out of touch with each other. Dunne's two children, eight and ten, went to their rooms and retired. The servants washed the dishes and collected to themselves in the service wing. The house brooded, waiting for the return of the boating party.

Every few minutes the clicking of Twitty's typewriter ceased and he went to the door and listened for some sound of the returning people.

At a little after ten he got it—the scrape of feet on the front porch, the sound of laughing voices, the opening of a door. He darted to his bed and threw back the nearest pillow. Underneath was the gun, a pair of light dress gloves, and a small flash light. With shaking hands he pulled on the gloves, concealed the light in one hand, and the gun and silencer under his coat, and let himself out into the hall.

The halls were all carpeted heavily. Twitty's feet made no noise as he advanced cautiously. The lights were not very bright either. The matter of his gloves and shaken appearance would not have been noted by a casual glance.

Twitty was in a bad way. It took the last shreds of his will to drive his body on this mission of death. Only the thought of the hold Fillgate had on him sent his feet forward. He was shaking as if in a nervous chill; things swam a little before his eyes as he thought of what he was going to do. He fastened his mind dumbly on Fillgate's instructions and proceeded more like an automaton than a reasoning creature of flesh and blood.

The connecting halls made it a simple matter to get from the west wing to the north wing without any one seeing him. He counted three doors

mechanically, tried the knob of the one Fillgate had indicated. It was unlocked. He slipped in, closed the door softly behind him, and switched on the tiny beam of the little flash light.

He saw a bed, chairs, dresser, mirror, closet door, bags on the floor, a brief case— Noted them all hazily, and went to work ransacking the room and making it look as if a burglar had been in there. The window was already open.

He heard faintly the sound of music from the front of the house. It was still going when he finished his task of disorder and took his station back of the door, the revolver clutched tightly in his hand. Silent, quivering, he waited.

VI

THE boat trip was a success. When they were all once more in the living room of the house, Marvin Dunne proposed genially: "Let's have some music."

"Good idea," Fillgate agreed heartily.

Mrs. Dunne, a charming woman in her early thirties, said with a smile: "I don't believe you two men want to get at the work you claim has to be done while you're here."

Fillgate chuckled. "I don't, for one. Had all I could stand this last week. Eh, Marvin? How about you?"

Dunne laughed agreement. "Another week like the last will unsettle my reason. I believe the whole country has gone stark, raving mad. The investing part of it anyway." He moved over to the large electric phonograph, selected a record, and put it on. They all relaxed in chairs and listened with the casual interest of people who have music of any kind on tap whenever they wanted it.

Dunne played fox trots. After a little, he began tapping his feet; and then beckoned his wife and began to dance with her. They could do that, these two, though they had been married years, and find happiness in it.

There had been three guests at the house when Fillgate and Dunne arrived. They were a Mr. John Kensington and his wife, from New York, and a Miss Mary Stevens, from Boston.

John Kensington took the cue from Dunne, and in a few moments was dancing with his wife. Miss Stevens, a brunette, who should not have lacked for a partner anywhere, looked appealingly over at Fillgate.

"Do I have to sit here and watch my feet misbehave?" she queried archly.

"Haven't danced for some time," Fillgate told her uncomfortably.

It was, as a matter of fact, a direct lie. He wanted to sit alone and concentrate on the matter that was rapidly coming to a head—if Twitty had done his part.

Miss Stevens spiked his excuse goodnaturedly.

"That's all right. It's time you got your hand, or rather foot, in again."

She stood up, and Fillgate perforce had to dance with her. He did, as gracefully as possible.

Presently partners were exchanged. Fillgate danced with Mrs. Kensington. And when partners were again exchanged he found himself with Mrs. Dunne. He would have preferred not to have it so, but since she was there he made the best of the matter.

"Marvin says you both really have been worked to death," she commented as they danced easily together.

"Yes," he agreed. "It's been a bad week."

"I wish Marvin didn't have to stay

in the city and work so hard," she said wistfully. "I worry about him."

"Don't worry about him," Fillgate told her lamely—and felt himself flushing. He wished savagely that the music would end. This business of dancing with Dunne's widow—or the woman who would soon be his widow—was not to his liking.

The music stopped.

Fillgate would have been glad to sit down again, but Dunne said cheerily as he went to change the record: "Let's have another, as we are."

And again Fillgate put his arm about the waist of the woman he was wronging so grievously. It aroused in him a sullen irritation, a desire to have the thing over with quickly now. When the music stopped, he said to Dunne casually: "I think it's about time I did a little work before going to bed. Would you mind going to your room and getting the Margate correspondence, old man? If I remember rightly you brought it in your brief case."

Dunne chuckled and shook his head.

"You did," he declared. "Don't you remember slipping it in your case while we were talking at your desk?"

Fillgate shook his head.

"I'm almost certain you brought it," he insisted. "Look and see."

"No," Dunne said, still smiling. "I'm certain myself, Rufus. Go and look through your brief case yourself. You'll see that I'm right."

There was nothing to do but make the trip to his room and pretend to look. The Margate folder was there all right. He'd have to come back and admit it. But, he determined sourly, he'd find another excuse to send Dunne to his room alone. The point was that he wanted to be down there in full sight of every one when it happened. Since he would get a large sum of money from one of Dunne's life insurance policies, he didn't want to stand in the slightest shadow of suspicion. Damn the man anyway for being so stubborn.

He was in a black frame of mind as he jerked open the door of his room and stepped into the blackness there, and closed the door.

A dark shadow stirred behind that door. A hard object was thrust into his side. Even as Fillgate went rigid in startled amazement, a muffled crack sounded. And another. And another.

He dropped with a groan, his heart riddled with lead. Dropped and lay there motionless on the rug.

With a gasping breath, the thin, slight figure that had shot him, bent over him and pressed the button of a small flash light.

Twitty almost cried aloud as he saw who he had killed.

Rigidly he bent there in the blackness, fighting the mad thoughts that surged through his mind. Then, in a flash, he realized what had happened. Remembered every word that had been said when Fillgate issued directions. "Take the right door. The side that you *write* on, fool."

Twitty had forgotten all else but that. The hand he *wrote* with.

Rufus Fillgate had forgotten, or never noticed, that his secretary was *left-handed.*

With a great effort Twitty got control of himself, and fumbled in Fillgate's inside coat pocket. He found there the paper he desired, and fled out the open window with it. Fled to the safety that Fillgate had devised.

A little later Marvin Dunne came along the hall whistling. He called genially as he paused to open his door:

"Rufus, old man, what did you find?"

Rufus Fillgate did not answer.

CHARACTER REVEALED IN YOUR HANDWRITING

EDITOR'S NOTE — *After making character analysis, through handwriting, his hobby for more than a score of years, John Fraser has recently won wide renown in New York City as a popular lecturer on this subject.*

He conducts a thriving business of analyzing character from handwriting; and many notables in this country and abroad have complimented him on the accuracy of his findings.

JOHN FRASER

By special arrangement his personal analysis is given to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY *readers for ten cents in U. S. POSTAGE, or free with a $1.00 subscription for thirteen issues (in Canada $1.75 for subscription). Please fill out the special coupon.*

much. Can you tell
work I am best fit

(Mrs. P. F. H., Schenectady, N. Y.) As far as I can see, you possess a good, constructive mind, with a controlled and practical imagination. You are thoughtful, sometimes without concentration. You are a woman who is careful and prudent in all her affairs. You could be trusted to administer the affairs of some one else judiciously and honestly.

From another angle, I see that you are very outspoken and candid, and do not believe in keeping information to yourself. You are a very talkative little person, and love to hear the sound of your own voice. To be able to use the tongue fluently is undoubtedly a great advantage in some cases, but I think the power to keep silent is equally advantageous. A shut mouth catches no flies, and at the same time sidetracks a lot of trouble. You are also blessed with a strongly developed ego, which almost passes into self-conceit. You love display, and it pleases you especially when you can feel that you are the center of attraction.

As I have said before, self-conceit is a poor seat to sit on, and a sign of weakness in the upper story. You are far too sensible a woman to adopt the first personal pronoun "I" as your coat-of-arms, and I advise you to get out of this self-centered frame of mind.

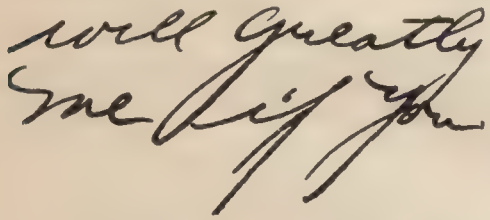
for I know you will
as stated for the

(Mrs. B. V. E., Woodstock, Ont.) I am sorry to say that you are a woman who worries overmuch, and usually about nothing at all. You remind me of the old Scotch lady who used to tell me that she was never so happy as when she was miserable. In looking deeper into your nature, I see no reason

why you should go through life wearing black spectacles.

You have a tremendous lot to be thankful for. Great imaginative power, business ability, keenness of perception, discretion, and a good education are all part and parcel of your make-up. These admirable traits, however, will never mean anything to you so long as you overshadow them with a thick curtain of pessimism and worry. You would do well to remember that worry is the devil's choicest brand of smelling salts, and a large proportion of our unhappiness is caused by anticipating casualties which never take place. Far too many men and women with this pessimistic tendency are like cider. They get sour with age.

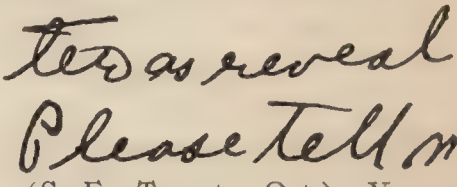
I would suggest you get a little more vitamins into your system—the sunlight vitamin especially. You have no more worries than I have. Life is about the same with most of us, a streak of lean, a streak of fat, with the lean predominating.



(J. L., Detroit, Mich.) I would say that you are more than ordinarily affectionate; generous hearted to a degree, and inclined to be a little too demonstrative in your manner. As far as your honesty and straightforwardness are concerned, there is no question. Your word is as good as your bond, and your sterling qualities are additional assets to your personality.

You impress me as a man who has lots of self-assurance. Yours is a dominating, if not a domineering nature. It is insistent and demands what it goes after. I would say that you have executive ability plus. A fine business head on your shoulders, and judgment sufficient to carry you to great heights of success. You are also a good-natured fellow, very candid and outspoken—away from home. By your own fireside you are probably more of a listener than a talker. At least I hope you are, for any woman married to you would soon become a chronic invalid if she had to listen to your verbosity day in and day out.

Moreover, your power of fancy is rather pronounced in your calligraphy. This trait leads you into great flights of imagination. And you have considerable self-conceit. When any honors are going the round you hate like the dickens to be overlooked.



(S. E., Toronto, Ont.) You are lacking in stability. You are changeable, and, at times, taciturn, reminding me of the weather-cocks on our church steeples. Like so many more of your kind, other people's opinions play a large part in your thinking. Your love for flattery is also very pronounced in your nature. You can both give and take a lot of these perfumed "nothings," particularly when the ladies are around. And this leads me to say that you are romantic, and not given much to conventionality. In fact, you are foolishly eccentric in some things, such as your dress and manners.

More serious, however, than any of these weaknesses I have already mentioned, is your utter lack of ambition. There seems to be no urge within you to get on in the world. It's "come-

day, go-day" all the time with you. Sooner or later this mental indolence will be responsible for relegating you to the department of has-beens. And rightly so, for a lazy man is not worth his salt, much less his potatoes.

You would do well to remember these three essentials to happiness and success; something to do; something to love; and something to strive for.

Specimen of handwriting

(T. O. C., Providence, R. I.) Your outlook on life is wide. Small things don't appeal to you at all. You are a go-ahead individual who has an objective and is determined to get there. You belong to the type who have a habit of saying what's what. A lawmaker and a reformer who believes that the world will soon go to the devil if something is not done about it.

I observe that you are a quick thinker, and also a good talker. This latter trait doesn't add a thing to my estimation of you. As a matter of fact, it detracts, since you are of the gibble-gabbling variety, and that's not much of an asset to any man. Open air and open minds are both essential to life and progress, but an open mouth does more harm than good. I have always found that when the tongue is making two thousand revolutions per minute it's a safe bet that the brain is in neutral. A little curb on this verbosity of yours might add to your popularity in the way of business and friendships.

I'm glad to observe that you are a fellow who gives liberally. Your magnanimity is refreshing and makes me believe that you've got the goods if you would only stop chasing people away by your windiness. Your impulses control your actions, and your affection is steadfast enough to satisfy the most fastidious of women.

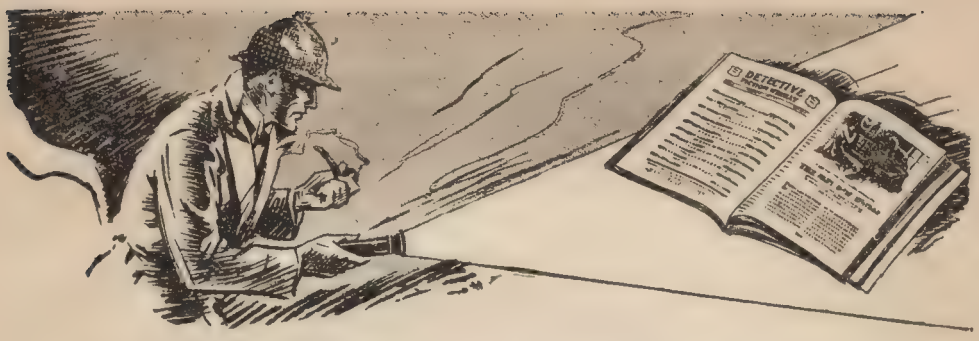
Do you want Mr. Fraser's analysis of your character and a personal letter from him? Then send us the coupon and six lines of your handwriting, in ink, with ten cents in U. S. POSTAGE. Mr. Fraser will send you an analysis. Or, send us one dollar for a thirteen-weeks' subscription to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY *(in Canada, one dollar and seventy-five cents), and Mr. Fraser will send you a FREE analysis!*

To John Fraser, Detective Fiction Weekly, 280 Broadway. N. Y. City

Signature_____

Street_____ **City**_____

11-30



FLASHES FROM READERS

Where Readers and Editor Get Together to Gossip and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind

WE seldom use this space to tell you readers what we have in store for you—as a general thing, we prefer to let this department be guided wholly by what DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY "regulars" are thinking and saying.

But this time we want to make an exception and caution you to be sure to begin, next week, Fred MacIsaac's newest novel, "Gems of Jeopardy." You will remember his extremely popular serial "The Winged Murderer," which appeared in this magazine several months ago. We think you will like "Gems of Jeopardy" even better. Don't miss it!

A LIST OF FAVORITES

DEAR EDITOR:

Inclosed are my ten votes. Even if there were some stories in your magazine that I did not like, I should not fill in the "I did not like" line, because the majority of the other stories would make up for those few that did not appeal to me. Charles Somerville's stories are the best of the fact stories. Regarding the fiction tales, *Lester Leith, Ranger Calhoun, Riordan,* and *Jimmy Dugan* rank first. Besides these, some of the best short stories were: "A Shooting in Piccadilly," "The Mystery Master," "Out of the Night," "The Blind Apartment," "Hello, Jim!" "Goats Have Beards," "The Fluke," and "The Diamond Wager."

People that criticize your magazine ought to start one of their own and set the example.

I like the cryptogram department very much and try them every week. Being an amateur, I do not always get them. As yet I have not tried John Fraser, but probably will do so soon.

Very respectfully yours,
FREDERICK E. POOLE, JR.,
Newport, R. I.

CHEAP? SURE, A BARGAIN!

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been reading your wonderful magazine for three months.

My own snobbishness in thinking a ten-cent magazine was too cheap to be reading has cheated me out of many an enjoyable hour.

In my humble opinion, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY is worth one dollar of anybody's money, providing it is good old U. S. A. coin.

Eddie Guerin's life story was a masterpiece. The *Lester Leith* stories are my favorites and I get a great kick out of his old side partner, *Scuttle.*

J. J. SPARKS.
New York City.

WHAT HE PREFERS

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been reading your magazine for some time, but of all the stories, those that I like best are "The Small Glass Eye," "the Clew of the Green Beard," and "The Masked Strangler." Please give us more of "Sapper's"

stories and also more of Martin Porter's. I am inclosing my ten votes, for which I expect to receive an original picture and also more good stories to read.

Yours truly,
HAROLD ICHILIAN,
Washington, D. C.

CRITICIZING THE CRITICS

DEAR EDITOR:

You ought to be an exceedingly wise man, that is, if your intellectual system can assimilate all the gratuitous advice tendered you!

The peanut vender can always tell the president, and other powers that be, exactly how to run the country successfully!

If you add all the very desirable things suggested, your excellent magazine will assume the vast proportions of Webster's unabridged.

On the other hand, if you cut out all the stuff suggested by some readers, you will merely send us the covers, and we will proceed to place between them all the good and acceptable things we know about!

We drop a dime into a beggar's hand and then forget all about it, but when we pay a dime for a magazine we assume the right to tell the editor how to run his business—some nerve! It is a well balanced magazine, and it always contains the money's worth, even if you read but one story.

Here's hoping,
C. J. H.,
Jacksonville, Fla.

A WORD TO YE EDITOR

DEAR EDITOR:

I have never written a letter to any magazine, but the screed from the pen of Chas. A. Millsfield of Hollywood riled me up so, that I shall have to get some of it out of my system.

No magazine that was ever published could possibly suit every person in every way. Personally I do not like the true stories, but I am perfectly willing that those that do like them should have them. I don't have to read them. *Flynn's*—it will always be *Flynn's*, no matter if the powers that be did see fit to change the name—has plenty of good stories that should suit a majority of the readers. Millsfield rather has the idea that he can plan out, better than the editor, just what the readers of this magazine want, and just what they should have. I certainly am pleased that he has no authority to change things.

As it is, I think the great majority will manage to get along with the magazine just as it is. Those that don't like certain authors and certain stories, can just let them alone, but please don't let their peculiar ideas have any weight with Ye Editor. Most of us like most of the magazine and are willing to live and let live.

Very truly,
L. W. FLEWELLING,
Long Beach, Cal.

"A FOOT THICK"

DEAR EDITOR:

I've inclosed my ten votes for a sketch of some story in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

I've been following "White Scars" up each week. I don't see why DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY can't be a foot thick, for I never can wait for the next issue.

Don't forget this! We want more of Madeleine Sharps Buchanan's serials.

A sincere reader,
OPAL HIGGINS,
San Jose, Cal.

Get an artist's original illustration of a story in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. Fill out and send us coupons from ten different issues of the magazine.

"HERE'S MY VOTE"

Editor,
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

5._____

I did not like_____

because_____

*Name*_____

*Street*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____

11-30

SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

Edited by M. E. Ohaver

PROCEEDING further in our program to reveal the mysteries of the cryptic art so that all who look may understand, this week's quota of space is duly dedicated to some pertinent remarks on the vowel "I."

This letter is one of relatively high frequency, occurring about 70 times in 1,000 letters of average text. This proportion is not to be taken exactly for short cryptograms, of course, where frequencies are apt to be distorted. Nevertheless, even in most short messages "I" is likely to be represented by one of the high-frequency symbols.

"I" is sometimes easy to recognize through the fact that while of average high frequency it is only sparingly used as a final. To be sure, there are numerous common words ending in "I," such as *khaki, macaroni,* and so on; but not very many of these will ordinarily occur in a short message.

An even more distinctive characteristic of "I," however, is its frequent use as an antepenultimate letter in the longer words. In average use the letter will occur about one-fifth of the time in this position in words of six or more letters. This peculiarity is due to the numerous endings employing "I" as an antepenultimate letter, as *-ing, -ion, -ity, -ive, -ies, -ine, -ied, -ice, -ite,* and many others.

The commonest prefix using "I" as initial is *in-;* and the commonest suffix with "I" as penultimate is *-ic.* Common short words containing "I," such as *I, if, in, is, it, its, him, his, did, into, with, this,* and so on, are also of frequent occurrence in cryptograms and of great help in solving.

Try to locate the "I's" in this week's cryptograms, using the foregoing information. No. 1 will also quickly yield to a comparison of V, HNVP, and HNU, not to mention AP, the prefix AP-, and the suffixes -APY and -ARP. Proper analysis of the short words in No. 2 will give all but two letters in FQPNJZLIF. No. 3 you must puzzle out for yourselves.

No. 1—By Mrs. V. L. Butts.

V NIPON AT TREUHNAPY JUSAPAHU; BUTT APHIAHARP HNVP SCIAHARP RS TUUJT TRGP AP HNU TILORPTOARITPUTT LM RLTUCXVHARP, CAZUPAPY AP V TIPPM EREUPH RS APTZACVHARP.

No. 2—By F. J. R.

GWPTGKWX LKIZ: IQZ "HLPITKWX" JZIQKX KY FIKDPLO WLX VGWUPLO UWGTKWX YGZPOQI FQPNJZLIF PL GWPTDWA UWGF PF FHNZGPKG IK WLA WF AZI XZCPFZX.

No. 3—By Fred M. Holmes.

ACBDABEFAG HJKAAL AEMOGBN KFLQJOR JAEFKSJE BOJATASJEMG FSBTBOJN, CSJOV OMX, GFAEYXMGEMSO JAGESJNBJO QACNBKBER KJLQJBTO.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

1—Many great men have humble starts in life; but through steady work they reach their goals.

2—Gay boy whets new hatchet near old grindstone while turkey cock squawks indignantly about cramped quarters, unaware his granary abiding place may prove his last abode.

3—Vagabonds, as birds, fly south, wander wearily westward hunting milder climes when winter winds worry them.

Send us your cryptograms; and remember that all solutions submitted will be credited on our monthly Solvers' Lists. Answers to this week's cryptograms will appear in the next issue.

COMING NEXT WEEK!

FRED MacISAAC is with us again. Listen.

A young American who has just spent the savings of five years on a European spree lands in New York jobless and penniless.

In his cheap uptown hotel he reaches in his pocket and pulls out—of all things!—a chamois bag containing seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of sparkling diamonds!

The diamonds are not his, and the young man has no recollection as to the manner in which he might have acquired them. Then he recalls a flashily dressed, loud-spoken man who had slapped him vigorously on the back just before the boat docked.

He has been made a dupe for diamond smugglers. That explains why the man wanted to know his New York address. Fortunately he had tossed off a careless remark about the Blitz, although he knew well enough that he couldn't patronize even the news-stand at this ultra-swank hotel. He telephones his boat acquaintance at the Blitz, guessing that the man would expect him there, and is not surprised to have the gem smuggler offer to make a little business deal "interesting" for him. But before the young adventurer can make up his mind about the matter he reads in the newspapers that the gem smuggler has been murdered!

What should the young man do? He hadn't willfully smuggled jewels into the country. If he turned them over to the Customs his story might not be believed. If it was he might be rewarded with only a letter of thanks, or a meager reward in the distant future. But the young man has a hotel bill to settle. He wants to work, to make an honest living—but jobs aren't picked up in a minute.

No one would know if he sold a jewel and secured enough to carry him until he could find work!

But the young man is unacquainted with the long, sinuous tentacles of New York's underworld. His first move sucks him into the maw of Gotham's sinister undercrust. He is no crook, either by nature or by circumstance, and he fights back. But it is a woman, and an incredible series of circumstances, that bring him through in the end.

Don't miss one of the most exciting and penetrating tales that has ever been written by this master of mystery stories.

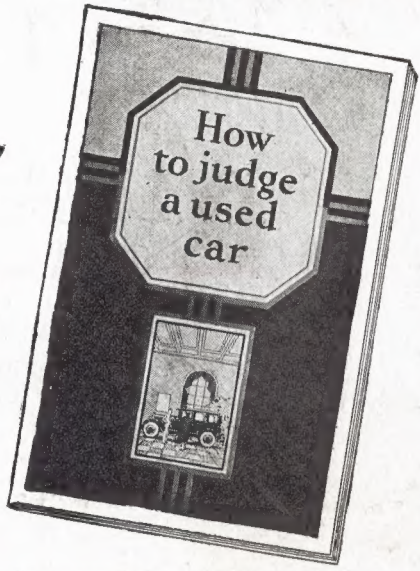
"Gems of Jeopardy"

By Fred MacIsaac

In the same issue are other gripping and thrilling yarns by J. ALLAN DUNN, ROBERT H. ROHDE, FRANK KING, J. W. MURRAY, GARNETT RADCLIFFE and others. Watch for

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—December 7

This FREE BOOK answers questions—



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ABOUT once in a "blue moon" some genius pops up with a new invention that everyone has been waiting for. Then, presto! Almost like magic, agents' profits go soaring overnight to tremendous heights! And now the cold hard-boiled facts about this amazing new can opener bear convincing proof!

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This queer new device doesn't just cut a ragged hole around the edge of the can. It lifts the entire top completely out, clean as a whistle! The machine holds the can—opens it—flips up the lid so you can grab it—and gives you back the can without a drop spilled, without any jagged edges to hack your fingers—all in a couple of seconds! You just put the can in the machine—turn the handle—and almost instantly the job is done! Built to do the job better than anything ever devised! Will last a lifetime! It's far more than just a can opener, it's a real **can-opening machine!**

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Women hate the old style can opener—and with good reason, too. It's the last relic of barbarism in the modern kitchen. Yet every day millions of women have to open cans the dangerous, laborious old-fashioned way. Food is spilled and wasted. Fingers are cut and torn—often followed by infections and blood poisoning that result in expensive doctor bills. Opening cans the old way is a job nasty enough to make most any **man** swear—this amazing new way—it's so easy a ten-year-old **child** can do it with perfect safety! No wonder women—and men, too—simply go wild over it!

I want you to see this surprising new invention with your own eyes. I want you to know why everyone, man or woman, falls for it the instant they see it. Whether you are an experienced salesman, or never sold a penny's worth of anything in your life—I want to tell you about a remarkable new sales plan that wins you a profit on every call you make. This plan is made possible by another spectacular money maker in the Speedo line and guarantees you a steady income of up to $150 in a week!

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